

真の仲間じゃないと
勇者のパーティーを
追い出されたので、

辺境で

スローライフ

することに

しました

Banished from the brave man's group,
I decided to lead a slow life in the back
country.

ざっぽん

illust. ざっぽん

Slow Life Frontier

**Shin no Nakama janai to Yuusha no Party wo Oidasareta
node, Henkyou de Slow Life suru Koto ni shimashita**

- Volume 1 -

**Let's start a slow life at the frontier
since I was kicked out**

**-Author-
Zappon**

**-Artist-
Yasumo**

[Tseirp Translations]

- STORY -

In a Fantasy world in which a young girl with the Divine Protection of the Hero battles against the Demon Lord. In that world, Red, the elder brother of that young girl Hero, possessing the Divine Protection of the Guide which only grants a high initial level, fought in the initial party of the Hero.

However, with a Divine Protection that only grants a high level but no magic nor martial art nor supernatural ability, he gradually could no longer keep up with the battle and in the end, a companion, a Sage, remarked 'You are not a true companion' as he snatched all his equipment and kicked him out of the party with just a single copper sword.

Having his heart completely shattered, Red distanced himself from the battle against the Demon Lord's army despite knowing that the fate of the world rests on it, aiming to live an inconspicuous life alone at the frontier Zoltan as he earns money to open a herbalist shop by utilizing the knowledge he acquired throughout his journey.

Together with the Half-Elf Carpenter living downtown and the Princess who couldn't become the Hero's companion, he aims to live a slow life in the frontier of the world governed by a person's inborn Divine Protection!

「ねえ、
私もこの店で働いていいかな？
住み込みで——」

リット

【リーズレット・オブ・
ロガーヴィア】

ロガーヴィア公国のお姫様。以前レッド達と冒険を共にしたことがある。色々あってレッドの店に押しかけ一緒に暮らす。ツン期の終わった元ツンデレ。

ナオ・ストウ

タンタの母親でエプロンの似合う家庭的ハーフエルフ。“白眼病”のタンタを救ってくれたレッドに深く感謝している。サウナ通いが趣味。



「お風呂に入りたいわー」
「お風呂に入りたいわー」

「お風呂に入りたいわー」

レッド

【ギデオン・ラグナソン】

スキル“初期レベル+30”を持つが、レベルが追いつかれてしまったことで勇者パーティーを追いつけられ、辺境でスローライフをすることに。

薬の評判は口コミで広まってくれたようだ。夕方になると多くの客が薬入りクッキーを求めてやってきた――



ストーム サンダー

レッドの暮らす下町で家具屋を営むハーフオーク。頑固な下町の職人だが、お金持ちの客がくると普段見せないような営業スマイルで接客する。

ニューマン・ ヴィンタース

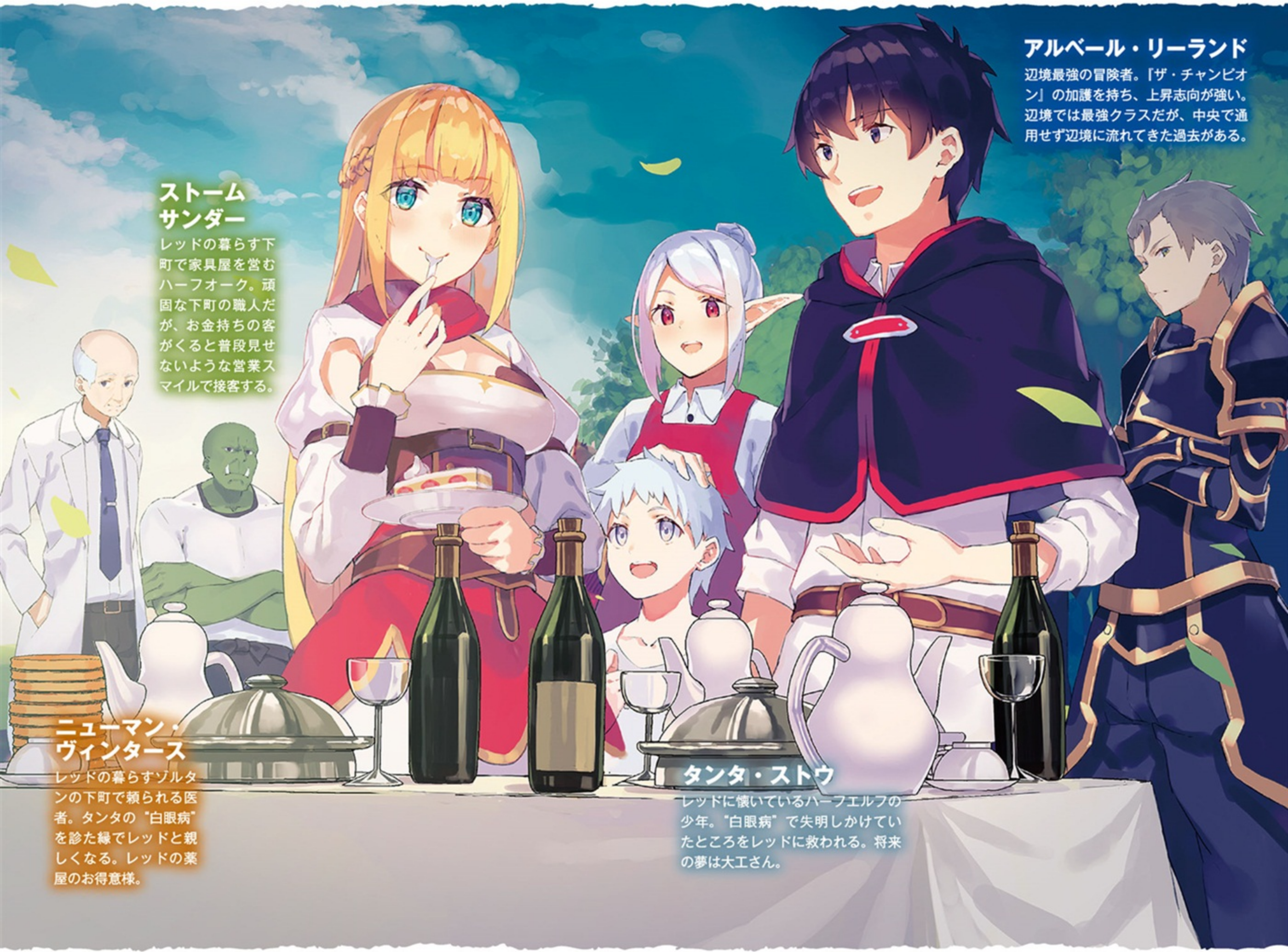
レッドの暮らすゾルタンの下町で頼られる医者。タンタの“白眼病”を診た縁でレッドと親しくなる。レッドの薬屋のお得意様。

タンタ・ストウ

レッドに懐いているハーフエルフの少年。“白眼病”で失明しかけていたところをレッドに救われる。将来の夢は大工さん。

アルベール・リーランド

辺境最強の冒険者。「ザ・チャンピオン」の加護を持ち、上昇志向が強い。辺境では最強クラスだが、中央で通用せず辺境に流れてきた過去がある。



ダナン・ラボー

「武闘家」の加護を持つ筋骨隆々の大男。かつて魔王軍に滅ぼされた町の道場主だった。しかし、そんな暗い影など見せない豪快な性格。

ヤランドラ

植物を操る「木の歌い手」という加護を持つハイエルフ。ロガーヴィアでの戦いから勇者の仲間になる。仲間の中でもレッドを強く信頼していたが……。

テオドラ・ディフィーロ

「クルセイダー」の加護を持つ人類最高峰の法術使いにして聖堂騎士流槍術師範代。ストイックな性格で武人肌。レッドの能力を高く評価していた。

アレス・スロア

「賢者」の加護を持つ人類最高峰の魔法使い。レッドをパーティーから追い出した張本人。没落した公爵家を再興するために勇者の仲間になる。

ルーティ・ラグナソン

人類最強の加護「勇者」をその身に宿すレッドの妹。昔はお兄ちゃん子でいつもレッドの後をついて回り、レッドも可愛い妹のルーティを溺愛していた。



Chapter 1

Apparently, I'm not a true companion

It has been three years since the start of the invasion of the Avalon continent by the dark continent under the rule of the Demon Lord of Fury, Taraxon.

In just three years, four countries have been destroyed and half of the continent had fallen to the hands of the Demon Lord.

The humans were at wit's end... but the Gods did not abandon them.

There was a prophecy that foretold the birth of the Hero.

And then, there was a young girl who commanded a local force in a land with barely any defenses and repelled the advance unit of the Demon Lord Army.

The Hero Ruti Lugnason appeared in the capital, evident to everyone to possess the Divine Protection of the Hero.

Having performed various acts like settling the capital's chaotic underground thief gangs or obtaining the proof of a Hero from the ancient Elves who slumber in the ruins, even the King believed that the young girl was the Hero of legend.

Then, the Hero embarked on a journey to save the world with the people's cheers and blessings.



Zoltan, a remote frontier far from the Hero's hometown and far from the Demon Lord Army's front lines.

Although rich in water sources, it is in the path of the storms coming from the southern sea so it is known by the North and East as the [Wall at the end of the World], with further exploration hampered by the Great Mountain Range. In addition, due to the widespread wetlands, transport was bad and development was slow.

Strategically, there was nothing worth noting.

With Zoltan's abundance of water sources and the flooding of the river due to the storm, the fertile earth supplemented with nutrients with good drainage meant it was a prime agricultural land where one could obtain crops just by sowing seeds. However, trying to earnestly set up an agriculture plot there would result in everything getting blown away due to the storm in most cases so the people there naturally ended up with lazy personalities that hated putting in the effort.

Everyone working in the capital fears being relegated to the Zoltan, the land of laziness. It was an abandoned land where even criminals do not approach as there was no way for them to earn there.

The only people who went there were either fugitives, hermits or weirdos.

However, for the current me, there was no better land to be in.

"Three kilograms of Henbane (*TN: Hyoscyamus niger/stinking nightshade*), two kilograms of *Lycium chinense* (*TN: A boxthorn species from which wolfberry is harvested*) leaves, and one bag of white berries..."

I strode up to the collectibles purchase counter in the Adventurers Guild with the medicinal grass I harvested.

"Thank you for your hard work as usual, Red-san... the total will be 130 Peryl."

The receptionist lady skillfully and promptly completed the weighing and handed me the money.

"Please come again."

The surrounding adventurers grinned and laughed as they saw me leave the counter.

"Hey Red, you went to harvest herbs again huh? Why not do some Goblin extermination

once in a while huh?"

"Sorry. This is my nature."

"But see, isn't it time, that copper sword is not cool. I feel ashamed as a fellow adventurer if you don't at least have a steel sword."

I shrugged my shoulders.

Of course, it didn't feel good to be made a fool of but it was nothing compared to that time.

These adventurers were just joking around and weren't serious. After all, they were also adventurers with the lazy soul of Zoltan, only accepting simple requests.

As to why I would be an adventurer in a place like this... it would be a story from before I became an adventurer specializing in harvesting herbs.



In the past, though I say that but it has not even been a year, I was in the Hero's party.

At that time, my name was Gideon Lugnason.

What's there to hide, the Hero Ruti Lugnason was my younger sister.

In this world, every person is born with a Divine Protection. It showed the way the person should live and was a power bestowed upon by the Gods, hence it was called Divine Protection.

According to the type of Divine Protection like [Warrior] or [Magic-user], it would grant powers in the forms of level and skills.

I had the unprecedented Diving Protection called [Guide].

Its power was Starting Divine Protection Level +30.

I was Level 31 the moment I was born.

I had the level of the Imperial Guard Knight class.

Naturally, I was fawned over, actually went to exterminate monsters from the age of six and was scouted by the Knight Order when I was eight. And I was promoted to become vice captain at the age of 18.

When it was known that my younger sister was the Hero, we were hailed as the twin wings of hope for humanity.

After finishing the battle together with Ruti at the frontier, when it was time to depart from the capital to defeat the Demon Lord, I was naturally added to the party.

At the very least, I was stronger than my younger sister at that time and was the top five knight in the capital. Nobody opposed to my addition to the Hero's party.

Apart from the Sage Ares who was also added to the party.

In the end, Ares was right.

My Divine Protection was [Guide]. A Divine Protection meant to protect the Hero's journey.

As the Heroes gained levels and acquired powerful skills, the problems of the [Guide] became clear.

The Hero Divine Protection had skills useable by a Hero, a Sage Divine Protection had skills meant for Sages, even the commonplace Warrior Divine Protection had skills prepared for Warriors but there were no skills meant for Guides.

The only skills I could choose from were the common skills everyone could learn.

Even though I was strong at the start of the journey, my companions gradually caught up to me, overtook me and I became baggage to the party.

My role was to aid the immature Hero but to step off the stage once the middle stage approaches.



"You are not a true companion."

After the end of the fighting against Desmond of the Earth, one of the Four Heavenly

Kings of the Demon Lord army, when we were at the celebration at the Lord's house, I was called outside by my companion Sage Ares and was told that.

"What do you mean?"

"A true companion is a companion who shares the tribulations and fight together."

"Am I not doing that?"

"You can tell it yourself right? To say it bluntly, you are a burden. The fight with the Four Heavenly Kings, Desmond of the Earth, what did you do?"

"...I was also wielding a sword to fight."

"No, your sword did not deal any decent damage to Desmond. More importantly, Desmond ignored you. Even though you were caught up in area attacks, he never once attacked you."

That was certainly true.

I was ignored by Desmond.

"You were not a threat to him and yet you could not avoid an area attack that wasn't even aimed at you. Having been injured, Ruti had to heal you. Just that alone would cost us one move."

"...That."

"Your existence is a weight for Ruti. Don't you think that is worse compared to just being a burden?"

"At the very least, I still put in the effort to be useful."

"Effort? Are you an idiot?"

"What!?"

"Even if you put in the effort and succeed, it does not excuse being a burden. Do you think you can be forgiven for being a burden because you put in the effort? Don't be selfish! You're not a true companion after all!"



I couldn't refute his arguments at all.

Maybe it was the right time. I thought.

I always had it at the back of my mind but... maybe today was the day.

"However, I am Bahamut Knight Order's vice captain, being sent home because I was a burden would hurt the honor of the Knight Order..."

"So you place the honor of the Knight Order before the danger to the world huh? Hmph."

"That's why I will investigate the Demon Lord army's status on my own from now on... and I will not return. At least let me do that."

"I see, fine. I'll match your story."

"...Thanks."

I tried to leave with my head down.

"Hey."

Ares stopped me.

"Leave your equipment, we were the ones who obtained them."

"....."

Leaving behind the treasured sword on my waist [Thunder Waker], the Ring of Mental Defense, the Evasion Coat and other equipment, I received a few coins for travel expenses and a cheap copper sword as I left.

However, I had lingering attachment.

The next day, I wanted to see my younger sister's face one last time before I left the party.

The younger sister who said Onii-chan, Onii-chan as she hugged me.

Of course, I was a lot weaker compared to her now but I was still worried how my younger sister would be on her own after that, moreover... I was hoping... to see if she was distraught now that I was no longer there.

But... the scene shown in my eyes when I secretly peeped into the window was that of Ares hugging my younger sister with his hands around her shoulder.

“I see... so that’s how it is.”

I was no longer needed. It became clear to me.

Just like he said, I was not a true companion.

Damn it, for some reason, tears came out.

You may no longer need Onii-chan but I would be happy if you would occasionally think of me... while muttering pathetic words, I left town at the break of dawn.

After that, I changed my name to Red, became an adventurer with a boring herb harvesting specialty and flowed to this abandoned land, Zoltan.



“It was tough then.”

Being alone, I sobbed despite being a man.

Having been kicked from the party, I had no drive to do anything for some time. After snatching money by swiftly defeating the bandit group that was plaguing the town I stayed in, although unaccustomed to it, I escaped reality through liquor.

But doing things like that made me stand out.

If my true identity was revealed, I would probably inconvenience the Captain and Lord who took care of me.

I psyched myself up, traveled to the frontier Zoltan as the adventurer Red and decided to have a new dream here.

“I will start a herb store as a business here at Zoltan and leisurely have a slow life on my own! I have no talent in fighting, I will live in peace from now on!”

I was worried for my younger sister but being weaker than her, there was nothing I could do.

I wasn't a true companion after all so I'll leave the Demon Lord to them and live for my own sake here!

For that sake, I gathered money through herb harvesting requests and drew a map for myself to show the distribution of medicinal herbs according to the season.

Chapter 2

Living at the frontier isn't that bad either

Perhaps you were wondering... maybe there was some hidden cheat skill for [Guide]?

But there wasn't any. There were none.

The Divine Protection's only gift was the inherent level up skill obtained as a starting skill. As well as the Common Skills that can be acquired anytime.

A [Guide] is able to obtain an extremely powerful skill as his starting skill, known as [Starting Divine Protection Level +30].

Divine Protection Level 30 is the typical level of Knights at their retirement age.

In other words, from the beginning, I had the level which most knights devoted their entire life to earn through battle.

However, I did not have any Exclusive Skills.

Since my ability was to be relatively strong from the beginning, there was no room for broad interpretations of how to put my sole skill into practice.

Because I didn't have skills, I was several stages weaker than any other person with the same level so even if I tried to accumulate skill points by defeating foes to become stronger, I won't be able to defeat monsters that others could and I would have to fight enemies that are several times less efficient than others.

Thinking about it that way, it was a skill that brought outrageous misfortune.

In terms of future prospects, lower grade commonplace Divine Protections like [Warrior] or [Magic-user] might even be better.

Having had my heart broken into two, I slowly earned money and aimed for a slow life.



I entered the mountain today as well to harvest herbs.

My only strong point was my high level so I had the stamina and while I didn't have Exclusive Skills, I had gathered all kinds of Common Skills.

With the Survival Skill, I would not get lost while mountain hiking as long as I don't enter too deeply and I was able to notice commonly harvested herbs.

It was a Common Skill after all so all it could do was show me herbs that are commonly harvested.

"Henbane grass that can be used to stop bleeding and disinfect wounds, *Lycium chinense* leaves that can act as an antidote, and Dragon God Mushroom that can be used to make nourishing tonics. The rare White Berry is a catalyst used in Magic Potions."

Hmm hmm~ ♪

I hummed to myself as I focused on my daily routine of harvesting medicinal herbs.

The mountains in Zoltan with its wealth of water sources could be said to be nature's treasure trove with the abundance of herbs and fruits.

"Ooo, Green nuts. Let's boil and eat them when I set up camp."

Medicinal herb harvesting basically takes two days and one night.

Because it takes about half a day to travel, returning the day itself would be extremely inefficient.

I traveled as a member of the Hero's party so I was accustomed to camping out. Other than herbs, I also found wild vegetables and spices that can be used for camping.

"But camping in the middle of the mountains is certainly tiring."

Monsters aren't afraid of fire.

I attached bells to a rope for peace of mind and placed my sword beside me before sleeping.

There weren't any strong monsters in the area but it was possible to suffer unexpected injuries if I was attacked in my sleep.

"Ah —, maybe I should just make a small hut."

The residents here don't construct mountain huts since it would be destroyed by a storm but it would be great if I could construct a fine hut that can weather the rain and wind as well as make monsters think it would be too troublesome to destroy.

Currently, I conducted my herb harvesting twice a week but it would be a lot easier if I could combine it into a four day three night journey. For that to work, I would need a small hut to act as my luggage storage and rest area to spend such a long time in the mountains.

"Well, that would have to wait until I gather a bit more money."

I fell asleep as I thought about future plans.

I woke up in the middle of the night.

I felt the presence of a large creature along with its scent coming from afar.

I pulled over my sword without making a sound and investigated the presence.

Even though I didn't have the unique skills granted by [Thief] and [Hunter] Divine Protections that enhances perception, my Perception Skill level was high as I didn't have any other skills to allocate my points into.

It would probably not apply to the elite Ninja squad of the Demon Lord army but it was more than enough to detect the presence of wild monsters living in the mountains.

The presence didn't indicate that it was approaching me immediately so I got out of

my sleeping bag and climbed up a tree without a sound.

The moon in the sky tonight was a sharp crescent moon shaped like a bow. As the moonlight wasn't sufficient, I couldn't see the figure of the monsters.

After watching for a while, I heard the ringing of bells.

And then, a large beast appeared from the darkness.

"Just an Owl Bear huh."

The demon beast Owl Bear with the face of an owl and the body of a brown bear.

It was a level 15 monster.

Among the demon beast that inhabit the forests of the world, it reigns at the top of the forest ecosystem in most cases so it lives freely as the King of the Forest.

How nostalgic, in the past, I remember fighting one when I chased after Ruti who went to search for her friend who got lost in a forest.

That was when I was seven years old.

Now, I could defeat it without any issues but...

"It's not like I can get prize money if I do so."

I nimbly jumped from the tree onto the ground.

Monsters like animals and low intelligence demon beasts can somehow judge that their opponents are mightier than them through their senses.

The Owl Bear met my gaze and slowly backed away before turning around and fleeing into the night.

I didn't give chase as I returned to my sleeping bag and slept until morning.

The next day, after I finished harvesting herbs, there was some commotion when I returned to town.

I tried asking the gate sentry about it.

“What happened?”

“Oo, Red, so you’re all right.”

“I’m fine as usual. There seems to be a commotion but what’s it about?”

“An adventurer was attacked by an Owl Bear. We’re now recruiting a subjugation corps so there would probably be a ban from entering the mountains until the subjugation is over.”

Oops —

I might have seen that Owl Bear after it attacked some adventurer.

“Seriously? How many days would it take?”

“No idea, we rarely have to subjugate something as strong as an Owl Bear. We either have to rely on an Ace B-rank party or if not, we’ll have to put forth a large mobilization of about 30 people.”

Adventurers are ranked into six ranks, S to E.

This rank was not for individuals but for parties and once there is a change in the party, it would be subjected to re-evaluation.

As a reference:

E: Newcomers who just registered.

D: A party that can survive in the wilderness where monsters prowl.

C: A party that can resolve a crisis that threatens a village.

B: A party that can resolve a crisis that threatens a town.

A: A national-class party that can resolve a threat that spans across multiple towns.

S: A legendary-class party that is mobilized to resolve continental or world crisis.

Fundamentally, an Adventurers Guild in any town would have 1 to 3 B-rank parties registered and they would serve as the top of the pyramid.

I was D-rank.

It couldn't be helped as all I did was harvest herbs and in the first place, becoming B-rank here would make me stand out and it might lead to my real name being revealed. If it was ever revealed, it would probably greatly inconvenience my benefactor, the Knight Captain.

"Looks like I'll have to stay in town for the time being."

It was great that it happened just after I finished harvesting medicinal herbs.

I headed to the Adventurers Guild to sell the medicinal herbs I had.



This time, the income was about 90 peryl.

Returning to my room in the inn I lived in, I maintained the Copper Sword that I've only used to mow grass recently and repaired my traveler's attire torn from the mountain trek.

My Repair Skill was raised quite high too. It was useful when I fought at the frontier before we departed from the Imperial Capital. In the end, however, as magic could repair the items, it turned into a skill that was completely useless during the subsequent journey.

However, currently I didn't know any Magic-user acquaintances who knew how to use the Repair magic and it would cost money to repair it at an armory. As I was gathering money to aim for a herb store, it was one of the skills that I had to re-evaluate.

Or rather, as I was currently only using a Copper Sword, the majority of my weapon skills could not be used. Although, in the first place, the effectiveness of Common Weapons Skills doesn't amount to much...

After completing my equipment maintenance, I took out eggs and potatoes from the

food compartment as well as the fruits I brought back from the mountain to make a salad and mashed potatoes for dinner.

Once I was done with that, I washed my body at the washroom and went to bed.

When I was together with Ruti, fights happened every day so our sleeping grounds were either battlefields strewn with dead monsters, dragon nests where evil dragons would swing by so there was a need for sentries with the constant fear of death or hell-like frigid snowy mountains. Now, although small, it was a room with at least a roof and walls.

Once I've accumulated enough money, I would build a home combined with a herb store and construct a garden at the back that can grow high demand medicinal herbs.

There won't be any huge success but there will also not be any life-threatening fights nor any mentally-wearing conspiracies. This was the life that could be found in this place called Zoltan.

This was my second life after being kicked out of the Hero's party.

Chapter 3

Half-Elf raised downtown

Three days later, 27 adventurers gathered to form the subjugation corps and set off for the mountains with the residents rooting for them.

During that time, I was at the river catching and selling fish.

My income was 8 peryl.

Given that 1 peryl could pay a day's stay in an inn inclusive of 2 meals, earning 8 peryl in three days was quite an earning... but the funds I needed to open a drug store was 1730 peryl.

I was accumulating it little by little but after subtracting the cost of the preserved food and the maintenance cost of my equipment whenever I set off for herb harvesting, my current daily income was about 30 peryl.

At this rate, I would have to continue harvesting herbs for about half a year.

“Oh well, that's fine too.”

There wasn't any need to rush it anyway.

There was no danger to my life so I could just take it slow.

I passed my day lazily as I laid on my bed and read a book I borrowed from the bookstore.

It was during the afternoon when I heard a knock on the thin front door of the townhouse.

“Yes yes~”

I inserted a bookmark, placed down the book and hung my copper sword on my waist

belt before opening the front door. Being prepared with a sword was a habit from my previous journey.

During those days, I was attacked in my sleep countless times so it was a fundamental habit to always be ready to arm myself. Thanks to that, now I could no longer sleep if I didn't have a weapon near me and when I had guests, I would feel uneasy unless I had a weapon on my waist.

Although I did think that I should cure that habit for the sake of my slow life...

"Who is it?"

When I opened the door, I saw the Adventurers Guild staff Meglia and a few steps behind, a man wearing armor with flashy decorations as well as his companions.

"Red-san, sorry to bother you during your rest day."

"Meglia-san, what's the matter? And even Albert too."

My words caused Albert... the armor wearing man's eyebrows to twitch.

"Attach the -san suffix, D-rank."

Albert was one of the only two B-rank adventurers in the town. Without any A-rank and above and the other B-rank adventurer Lit being a solo-specialist, Albert's party was seen as the Adventurers Guild's ace.

"...Albert-san. So, what do you want?"

Albert came closer to me and pat my shoulder with a grin.

"I've heard about you. As a medicinal herb harvesting specialist, nobody knows the mountain better than you right?"

"Well, kind of."

“My party will be heading out to subjugate the Owl Bear and while it is usually not an opponent we have to step forward for, the subjugation corps failed so there’s no other choice.”

Oh my, the subjugation corps was routed huh?

It shouldn’t have been a foe that couldn’t be defeated with those numbers but they were probably destroyed individually as they had to spread out on the mountain.

Noticing my expression which showed that I just found out, Albert gave a condescending smile.

“I didn’t think that you won’t know about it. Well, I guess for a person like you, an Owl Bear subjugation is way out of your reach anyway. Nevertheless, isn’t the mountain your lifeline? I think you should at least pay a little more attention. You’ll remain in D-rank for eternity with such an attitude.”

What’s with this guy, he suddenly started to preach.

While adding in suitable interjections to show that I was listening to him, I exchanged looks with the guild staff to move into the main topic.

“Albert-san, maybe you should stop there.”

“You’re right, we’re short on time.”

Albert’s companions also nodded.

The party was a one-man party by Albert. Only Albert had an exceedingly higher level while the others did not have the standard of a B-rank.

The other adventurers in the party rarely even talked without Albert’s permission.

“Like we mentioned earlier, we are setting off to subjugate the Owl Bear. But we have almost never done medicinal herb harvesting tasks before. We are not familiar with the layout of the mountain.”

“I see, so you want a guide?”

“Of course, the subjugation will be a breeze with just our party alone. However, we do not wish to spend countless days just on a single Owl Bear. It’s better if we finish it quickly with your guidance.”

“I’m a D-rank you know? Won’t it be better if you ask any of the adventurers who are still in action even though their subjugation party failed.”

Albert gave a disdainful look.

“Huh, this is a chance for you. You will gain an achievement just by guiding us. There’s even a chance you will get a promotion. Just what are you afraid of?”

I see. So he was rejected by the others huh?

I could guess from his dissatisfied expression. Most likely the adventurers doubted if Albert and his party could defeat the Owl Bear or whether they would still face danger even if the party could defeat it.

It’s quite rare to see a B-rank adventurer who makes light of an Owl Bear to this degree but... Albert was an adventurer who ended up in Zoltan instead of adventuring in the capital.

It’s an open secret in Zoltan that Zoltan’s guild forcibly certified Albert as a B-rank because they wanted a B-rank adventurer.

“Sorry but I refuse.”

“Why!? You will be able to accept more kinds of requests once you become C-rank! You will be respected by the people around you! You probably hate being made a fool by those adventurers right!?”

“I have no interest in being C-rank. Furthermore, my dream is to open a herb store and live an ordinary life.”

“Guh, forget it!!”

Albert shouted angrily, glared at me and spat on the floor before squaring his shoulders and walking off.

His companions also hurriedly chased after him.

Meglia was left behind and he hung his head.

“I would have been more relieved if Red-san accepted the request. I can even promise you a C-rank promotion.”

“Sorry, I really don’t have any interest in getting promoted.”

“There’s no helping it then, I’ll make a move too.”

“Yup, see you.”

With a nod of his head, Meglia also turned around to chase after Albert.

After watching them off, I returned to my home.



[Gan Gan] It was around dusk when I heard banging on the thin door at the entranceway to my house.

“Red-san! It’s me! Gonz!”

“Ah — Carpenter Gonz, I’ll be there shortly so please don’t bang the door so hard, it will break.”

From the sound of his voice, it seemed like he was badly in a hurry.

I just grabbed my sword before I opened the door.

“What’s the matter?”

Standing outside was the Carpenter Gonz with his pointed ears, a Half-Elf.

Regardless of his sharp and beautiful face, distinctive features inherited from his Elf mother, he received and continued the human-style carpentry techniques from his father along with his rugged nature. His unbalance in characteristics was, in a sense,

what a Half-Elf is like.

“I’m sorry for disturbing you but my younger sister’s kid is having a fever. According to the doctor, it is apparently the White Eye Disease.”

“Tanta has White Eye Disease!? Which phase is it at right now!?”

“Ph, phase? Erm, the fever just started and he has collapsed.”

“Phase 2 huh, okay I’ll go there immediately.”

Since I was planning to open a herb store, I had read up quite a bit on injuries, diseases, and poisons.

White Eye Disease is, as the name implies, a disease where the pupil of the eye turns white and cloudy.

The infection route is through birds, the pathogen gets transferred to the egg and the disease will develop if a person eats an infected egg.

It is possible to disinfect it through heat but it has a certain degree of heat-resistance and it would be dangerous if the egg is only half-baked.

The reason why this disease is so feared is that the infected person will become completely blind a couple of days after the symptoms develop. The initial phase will be high fever and the cure must be administered within 36 hours.

Of course, individuals with high Divine Protection level for Monk or Healer can treat them but...

In this remote Zoltan town, there was only one person capable of that, the former mayor Master Mistome but she retired due to old age and was currently quietly spending the rest of her life in an unknown location.

In addition, the current mayor Tonedo doesn’t seem to have a Divine Protection capable of using magic.

Gonz’s younger sister and her husband lived next to Gonz’s house. Tanta was their son.

The house wasn’t large but it has good exposure to the sun, there was a weathercock

on the red roof and there was a small gnome figurine in the green garden. It was a house with a rich homely atmosphere.

I could feel that it was an excellent house made lovingly by Gonz for his younger sister.

“Nao!”

“Gonz onii-chan!”

His younger sister Nao was also a Half-Elf with white skin and beautiful features.

However, like Gonz, she was born and raised in the downtown and now she wore an apron and was raising her own child.

Nao’s husband Mid was a human. He was a former adventurer and now he was a carpenter together with Gonz.

He was not as deft with his hands as Gonz so he was always scolded by Gonz but his calculations were quick and he complemented the rough Gonz in places where Gonz was lacking so Gonz always praised him to be a smart person when he wasn’t around.

Currently, the two of them looked haggard unlike their usual brightness because their son was infected with the White Eye Disease.

“Onii-chan, what should we do, there’s no medicine...”

“Don’t worry, I asked Red to help. He is the number one adventurer in terms of harvesting herbs.”

A regular adventurer would be angry but to me, it was an honest compliment.

However, it wasn’t the time to think about such things.

“What is Tanta’s condition?”

“The doctor is treating him at the back but he can’t do anything more without the medicine.”

“I understand, I’ll let myself in.”

In the bedroom at the back of the house, there was a boy who was gasping in pain due to the high fever... Tanta.

Beside him was Doctor Newman who was observing Tanta's condition with a grave look.

"Doctor."

"Ooo, you're Adventurer Red. Thank you for coming."

"I heard it was White Eye Disease?"

"Yes, I'm certain."

I said briefly before I looked at Tanta's eyes, the state of his lymph nodes and his oral cavity.

"The iris is turbid, countless mouth ulcers, swollen lymph nodes in the neck and armpits, the early symptoms of White Eye Disease."

"You know a surprising amount for an adventurer."

Newman commented as he wiped the sweat from his thinning head with a towel.

"How long has it been since the fever set it?"

"He apparently felt tired since from around noon. He collapsed about 3 hours ago."

"Looks like it will be bad if we don't administer the medication before tomorrow evening."

"That's the problem. There's no medicine."

The cure for White Eye Disease should consist of *Lycium chinense* leaves as well as Bloodneedle, a thorn-like mushroom. *Lycium chinense* leaves can be harvested all year round apart from winter but Bloodneedle can only be harvested between spring and summer.

It was currently spring so it was about the right time for harvesting.

“There’s been an outbreak of Goblin Fever and White Eye Disease since last month. All three of the hospitals in town don’t have enough medicine.”

“There’s probably enough *Lycium chinense* leaves but Bloodneedle huh... it’s about time they can be harvested though...”

The Adventurers Guild manages the medicinal herb inventory.

Normally, there should have been a priority request to harvest the insufficient Bloodneedle but...

“It would take some time for the guild to get approval.”

After pointing out the deficiency in the inventory, the in-charge will report to the superior, the superior will check the inventory, the in-charge will start drafting the documents, the superior will receive the documents and have the executives approve it, after those documents are collated, the in-charge will write the documents needed to send out the request, those documents will be verified by the superior...

“Zoltan’s Adventurers Guild is a bureaucratic workplace.”

Newman said with a frown.

Anyway, currently the situation was that there was no stock for the medicine’s raw materials.

Judging from Tanta’s symptoms, the cure must be administered before the sun sets tomorrow. Taking the compounding time into consideration, the Bloodneedle must be passed to Newman by tomorrow noon.

“Please help us, Red! I know that the mountain is dangerous now. But you are the only one who can help us! Could you please collect the herbs? Of course, I will pay whatever asking price you set! I will definitely pay even if it takes a number of years!”

After saying that, Gonz prostrated on the ground and vigorously placed his forehead on the floor.

“That’s right! He has the ability to be a Carpenter! I won’t let him lose his dream like his!”

Gonz doesn’t have children. Gonz’s wife died of illness before I came to this town and Gonz never married again, persisting to live a solitary life.

Because of that, he cherishes his younger sister’s son, Tanta, to the point that he says that Tanta will continue his work even though Tanta hasn’t even reached 10 years of age. Tanta was also attached to Gonz, having grown up and played in Gonz’s workplace, he professed that he will become like Gonz in the future.

But...

“Putting aside the danger, the mountain is currently out-of-bounds. Even as an adventurer, I can’t enter the mountain until the Owl Bear subjugation is over. If I break that rule, in the worst case, I might even have my Adventurers Guild registration revoked.”

“That, that is true but we don’t have any other ways to get the herbs.”

The husband and wife Nao and Mid also prostrated along with Gonz and placed their foreheads on the floor to beg me.

This is a pickle... currently, Albert and his party should be searching for the Owl Bear in the mountain.

They would probably set up camp if they failed to find it but if they found the Owl Bear, it’s possible that they choose to chase after it overnight.

Even though it is a large mountain, Albert’s party have adventurers who are experts in scouting. There’s a possibility they sense my presence on the mountain even if I only leave a slight trace behind.

Should I negotiate with the Adventurers Guild?

Impossible. I do not have their trust.

“Red onii-chan, you came?”

Tanta woke up and spoke with a weak voice.

Because of the high fever, even the tip of Tanta’s sharp ears, the proof of his Elf blood, was red. He looked at me and smiled.

“Sorry, I caught a slight cold. But I’ll discuss with you after I’m better.”

Gonz and the others looked at me when they heard him say discuss. That... it wasn’t really a big deal.

“Ah, that’s right. I promised that Tanta would be the one who builds my herb store. I’ll ask you again once you get better.”

It was a silly conversation I had with Tanta when I was playing with him.

I often talked to Tanta about my herb store, if it was built, what kind of floor plan should I choose, where would be a good place to build it, those kind of conversations.

It was then that Tanta promised, “Once I become a Carpenter, I will build Red onii-chan’s store for you.”

Well, that’s the story.

I had already decided what to do from the very beginning.

After all, there’s no other choice since we had a promise. For my glorious slow life, I need a modest but fantastic store.

“The Adventurers Guild currently forbids entry into the mountain...”

“Th, there’s no way?”

“That’s why I will not take this job this time as Adventurer Red but as a friend. So keep

it a secret okay?"

"Red!"

"I'll be back soon so take care of Tanta in the meantime, doctor."

"I'll do what I can. But I will need one hour for compounding."

"I'm more than thankful if you can do it in one hour. It would take me three hours instead."

I guess people with Healer job types and Alchemist job types or also the Divine Protection of Herbalist can utilize high speed compounding.

It's not possible for me.

Chapter 4

Mountain and Flames

This time I did not intend to stay in the mountains for long.

I only filled my water bag with water and hung my copper sword on my waist before leaving town.

I looked around after I ran into the outskirts.

“Now then, there’s nobody looking.”

I wondered when was the last time I ran seriously?

“Swift Mastery: Lightning Feet; Endurance Mastery: Fatigue Immunity.”

Even though they were common skills, once I raised the skill level up to level 11, the acquired master ability was strong in its own way. But there was rarely anybody who trained common skills to that extent so it was not well known.

Lightning Feet increased my movement speed by ten times such that when sprinting, my opponents would only be able to see a vague shadow of my figure.

Fatigue Immunity removed the feeling of tiredness. No matter if I stayed up all night or performed hard labor, I could run at full strength for the whole day. However, I would still be influenced by everything else apart from fatigue, so it was not like I could spend days on end without sleep as sleep was necessary by nature but the usefulness was undeniable.

I gathered strength into my legs and stepped one step forward. Followed by another step, and another step.

My body steadily accelerated and the surrounding scenery became a green blur that passed me by.

I am capable of running 1 km in 15 seconds when I reach my greatest speed. When converted to speed, it is approximately 240km/h. I would be able to run even faster with the support of magic but that was my limit when relying on my own strength.

That speed was equivalent to the flight speed of an Adult Dragon more than a 100 years old.

I continued running towards the mountain as night consumed the last light from the setting sun.



It took me about 30 minutes to reach the mountains.

Even though the road was worn-down, it was still possible to sprint at full speed but I wasn't able to do so in the lush mountain.

I had to continue at regular speed from that point on.

I took out my map and considered which route to take.

I didn't want to waste unnecessary time but I wished to avoid the possible routes that Albert and his party would take.

In that case, the route overgrown with trees should be fine. That route was exposed to sunlight even though it was within the mountain and based on Albert's nature which dislikes strong sunlight, he would likely avoid that route as long as no special circumstances arose.

And naturally, Albert's party would also put off that route.

"All right."

Since the route had been set, all that was left was to proceed.

By the time I noticed the smell, I felt panic for the first time in a long time as I clenched my teeth and ran.

“Damn it!”

The location where Bloodneedles grew en masse was wrapped in flames.

My hearing, enhanced by skill, picked up the angry shouts of Albert’s party in battle.

“Those guys actually used Fire Magic!”

Albert and his party used Flame Magic when fighting the Owl Bear.

Flame Magic has strong offensive power and it was certainly an established tactic to use it against resilient large size monsters like the Owl Bear.

However, the coniferous trees that the Bloodneedles parasitize on are suitable for firewood. They burn easily.

Furthermore, during this spring season with strong winds, it was dangerous to use Fire Magic in the middle of the mountain.

If the person standing there wasn’t me but Ruti or Ares or even anybody from the party, they could probably stop the fire and prevent a fire from spreading by using their inherent skills or magic.

But I couldn’t do anything. I do not possess a single skill that could eliminate the spread of the fire.

“Shit! Damn it!!”

The only thing I could do in that situation was to harvest as many Bloodneedles as possible.

Although the season for Goblin Fever was ending, we were entering the season for life-

threatening airborne illnesses like the White Eye Disease, the Red Tongue Disease, and the Trembling Fever. Bloodneedle was an indispensable medicinal herb in Zoltan during the summer.

And they were being incinerated.

That location was the only location which satisfied the needs of the Bloodneedle to grow. They only grew in that area of the mountain.

I ran through the flames and smoke to harvest Bloodneedle.

The smoke burnt my throat and the heat burnt my lungs.

Fatigue tolerance was ineffective against smoke as the oxygen deficiency and burns taxed my body.

But I could still move. The only benefit of my Divine Protection was to give me a high level.

Even if I didn't have unique skills, I still had the ability to take a beating corresponding to my level. That was why I could still tolerate it.

Nevertheless, I had my limits.

Surrounded by flames, breathing became impossible and I began to suffocate.

The lack of oxygen made my head heavy and dulled my five senses.

I heard a rustling sound.

An injured Owl Bear stood in front of my eyes.

That damned Albert, looks like he fled.

The frenzied Owl Bear, due to its injuries, relied on its fighting instinct and raised both its claws.

I placed my hand on the handle of my Copper Sword.

The heated handle made sizzling sounds as it burnt my palm.

The Owl Bear roared.

It swung both its claws down at me.

I drew my Copper Sword and slashed it from its flank up to its shoulder.





“Albert-san, this way!”

Relying on the tracking ability of his party member with the Thief Divine Protection, Albert and his party arrived at the Owl Bear that fell within the flames.

They had been magically granted heat and environmental tolerance. The smoke and heat would not damage them.

“Looks like it used up all its strength here. We’ve done it!”

Nevertheless, the Thief didn’t approach the Owl Bear. If, by any chance, it was still alive, he would be torn apart.

Even Albert was only able to endure an attack from the Owl Bear but he fainted in the process so the Thief could imagine his instantaneous death if that happened.

Even though he was still wounded, Albert had recovered 80% from Healing Magic and he approached the Owl Bear to cut off its front paw.

That would become proof of the subjugation.

“We’ve done it!”

“...This wound.”

“What’s wrong?”

“No, it’s nothing. Let’s leave before the magic effect wears out.”

“Yeah, even with magic resistance, it’s still hot and stuffy.”

A woman with the Divine Protection of a Monk raised her eyebrows when she heard the complaints of the Thief.

“There’s no helping it, this is a hostile environment which humans cannot withstand. Be grateful that you only feel this degree of pain.”

“I know, it’s a lot better than dying.”

The resistance-conferring magic was only effective for ten minutes. Even Albert and his party would collapse if that magic wore out inside this fire.

Albert and his party quickly ran from the fire.

Chapter 5

My Slow Life will start from here

“He, hey, Red, are you all right!?”

Six hours had not passed yet from the time I departed.

Most people were asleep at that time but because they were looking after Tanta, everyone was still awake.

They ran over when they saw me collapse on the ground with my whole body covered in black soot.

“Doctor Newman, here’s the Bloodneedle.”

“What!? How did you do it in such a short time, or rather, those are terrible burns, what exactly happened to you...”

“These are all the harvestable Bloodneedle this year for Zoltan... I’ll go into the details another time. The medicine comes first.”

“That’s right. I’ll make it now.”

Doctor Newman took the bag containing the Bloodneedles and returned to his own clinic. For the sake of compounding the medicine.

“Red, are you all right!? I’ll get the medicine for burns right now...”

“I’m fine, it’s not as bad as it looks. I’ll go wash my body at the well. I’ll be back soon.”

“He, hey, Red!”

My physical body was not fatigued. But going at full strength did take a toll after all.

I washed my head at the well and cooled my burnt body.

There was a waning moon in the night sky when I looked up.

Even though I used all my ability, I could only gather a bag full of Bloodneedles.

The limitation of my Divine Protection. Even though I have trained my common skills to the extreme, the things I could achieve without unique skills were limited.

“It’s natural that I was kicked out...”

If that was the result of my full ability, I couldn’t possibly save the world.



I returned home and applied poultice and bandaged the places where the burns were severe before heading back to Nao’s house.

“You three should be tired from taking care of him right? All that is needed to be done until the doctor comes back is to wipe his sweat and help him drink water. I’ll switch with you all.”

The three of them were shocked when I said that as I entered the room.

“Do, don’t be a fool! You should be the one resting!”

Gonz bellowed and dragged me to the neighboring room.

Placed there was probably a hastily prepared meal.

There were soup, sandwich, and diluted wine.

“Eat, my younger sister made it just now.”

“Oi oi, you guys should prioritize looking after Tanta at this point of time.”

“Just eat it.”

“All right all right, thank you for the meal.”

Left without a choice, I sat down and started eating.

Gonz continued to stare at me.

“What’s wrong, don’t dawdle here, get back to Tanta’s side.”

“You didn’t tell me how you ended up so tattered.”

“Albert and his party’s battle with the Owl Bear caused a mountain fire. So I hurriedly scraped up all the Bloodneedles. People suffering from the White Eye Disease will increase soon and it is also needed for other medications. It can be said that Tanta’s disease came at a good timing. If it only started tomorrow, all the Bloodneedles would probably have been burnt to a crisp.”

“...I’m really sorry that you had to go through all that to harvest the medicinal grass while I just remained carefree at home.”

“Don’t worry about it. This is Adventurers’ work after all. Furthermore... just prepare my reward.”

“Su, sure! A man won’t go back on his words! I’ll pay for it even if it takes my whole life!”

Gonz showed a wide grin.



The white turbidity in Tanta’s eyes quickly disappeared as soon as the medicine was prescribed.

It would take another week of rest and medication to completely heal but he would probably not suffer any after-effects.

Since he was already fine, Nyuman packed his tools in his bag and prepared to return home.

“Doctor, thank you very much!”

“It’s a blessing that I got the herbs so quickly. There shouldn’t be any decrease in visual acuity. It’s thanks to Red-kun. Ah, you don’t have to pay me the consultation fee, add that to Red-kun’s reward. I’ll discuss with the doctors from the other clinics about how we’ll properly utilize the precious Bloodneedle he gave to us.”

After Nyuman heard of the situation from me, he held both my hands and thanked me for harvesting the Bloodneedles.

He told me that he would pay me the harvesting fee but I rejected him.

Everything harvested by Adventurers must be sold through the Adventurers Guild. It was forbidden to perform direct trading.

Special permission was needed to trade. Selling the medicinal herbs to Nyuman there would be deemed as an illicit trade. It would be safest to trade them through official routes.

“After all, I’ll be relying on Doctor Nyuman once I fulfill my dream.”

“Your apothecary huh. Zoltan’s doctors will all be glad to have an excellent Adventurer like you run an apothecary. Let me know when you open your apothecary, I’ll probably have plenty of orders to place.”

“Thank you in advance.”

Doctors would be the frequent customers for an apothecary.

Performing a favor for them here and having them remember my name should benefit me in the future.

Nyuman once again grabbed my hand and gave me a strong handshake before he returned home.

“You’ve really saved us, please let me thank you once again.”

“Then, let’s talk about the reward while the topic is still fresh.”

“O, oh! You sure are direct!”

“Yeah, I won’t hold back. After all, I don’t hold back when it comes to what I want most.”

Gonz and the others looked nervous as I told them my desired reward.

Gonz was surprised at first but it quickly turned into a wide smile.



I sat on a bench and ate the fried sweet potato I bought from the food stall as I stared at the ceremony from afar.

On the stage, Mayor Tornado with his thick beard said words of appreciation to Albert and conferred him the Twin Swords Medal.

While the war against the Demon Lord army was intensifying in various lands, the Twin Swords Medal meant to extol meritorious deeds in the battlefield was conversely given out for the subjugation of a single Owl Bear, symbolizing the peacefulness of Zoltan which caused me to laugh.

The citizens cheered when the Twin Swords Medal was placed over Albert’s head.

“Tch, what a joke, even after they caused a mountain fire.”

“Gonz huh? What are you doing here? Even though you said you won’t be taking a break today despite always being the first to rest from work whenever there’s a celebration.”

“Idiot, like I would take a break for a celebration for those people. I came to get my lunch.”

Gonz was holding a basket of sandwiches and various fried food.

After taking a seat beside me, Gonz took out a piece of fried white fish and started eating.

“Red, in my eyes, you are a lot more respectable and awesome compared to those people.”

“Thanks but don’t worry about it. Albert is doing his best in his own way for this town.”

“Huh? That guy is?”

Albert who still retained his demeanor from the central region wasn’t well received by people from out of town like Gonz.

Even the multiple layers of formal wear famous in the capital he was wearing were only seen as sweltering and restrictive by the people from Zoltan.

But as the mayor and the wealthy like the central trend, his dressing and his behavior were well received by the upper class and it was likely done to give a good impression to the upper class.

“Well, it might just be because he has not become familiar with the frontier yet.”

“What are you talking about?”

“About Albert. Well, don’t criticise him like that. After transferring here from central, he had to fight a tough battle with an Owl Bear with a party as a B-rank adventurer. He was probably under quite considerable pressure too.”

“That might be true.”

“He’s still persevering despite that. It’s not like he set fire to the mountain just because he wanted to either.”

“I’m fine with it if Red is fine with it.”

Gonz said begrudgingly.

He meant that he wanted me... Red, to be rewarded instead but as a person who wanted to live inconspicuously, I didn’t need such attention.

After seeing Albert step off the platform, I tapped Gonz’s shoulder and bade him goodbye.

I’ll set off to harvest medicinal herbs tomorrow.

Furthermore, I would have to report the mountain fire to the guild but I had to first investigate how bad the fire was.

If I plan to set up an apothecary, I'll have to grasp the location of the remaining medicinal herbs quicker than anybody else.

Since my dream in Zoltan was about to come true.



“That wound...”

After the ceremony, Albert was on his own after the dinner with the influential people ended when he recalled the state of the Owl Bear corpse.

“That wasn’t a wound inflicted by myself... my sword can’t have caused such an injury.”

The slash wound from the flank up to the shoulder. As if it was a slash forcibly done using a blunt edge weapon.

“By like, for example, a copper sword.”

The figure of the D-rank Adventurer he requested to guide them appeared in Albert’s mind.

The sword on that guy’s waist was... certainly a copper sword.

“There’s no way.”

Albert shook his head.

To begin with, there was no way that guy would have been at that place. Albert muttered to himself.



Four months and two days after then.

Even though it was going to be autumn soon according to the calendar, the temperature in Zoltan from the summer days still refused to go down.

The mountain still showed off its lush green foliage as if saying that it wasn't interested in the current autumn color trend in the other parts.

The mountain fire site was already blanketed by vegetation, leaving no traces of the black charcoals.

I came to a section slightly away from the center of town.

The place was located between the residential area and the craftsmen district. It was about ten minutes walk away from the townhouse I lived in within the residential area. Naturally, that was in the walking speed of an ordinary person.

"So you're finally here."

"Red onii-chan! You're so slow!"

Gonz and Tanta waved at me.

Both of them were wearing neat formal wear.

It had also been a long time since I wore formal wear loaned from the rental shop. In the past, my younger sister and I used to meet nobles and royalty often so I've worn formal wear before but that was the first time since I left the party.

Behind the two of them was a newly constructed building. The building wasn't that large but it looked to have been built solidly so it gave off a sense of stability.

There was a sign set up above the front entrance.

[Adventurer Red's Apothecary]

This was the reward I requested from Gonz.

I would pay for the materials but the workmanship would be free-of-charge. With that, the saving I had on hand was sufficient.

And today we gathered to celebrate the successful completion of the building.

“Everyone is waiting for you so that we can start our meal, quickly quickly.”

“Okay.”

Tanta pulled on my hand as I was overcome with emotions when I saw the sign.

Inside the shop, Gonz and his carpenters, the Adventurers Guild staffs, Doctor Nyuman, and other people I was close to in Zoltan, adding up to about 20 people have gathered and been waiting for me.

“Ooo the VIP is here.”

“Looks like Red-san has also gotten used to Zoltan timing.”

I was sorting out the herbs for the sake of tomorrow’s grand opening and inadvertently lost track of time.

In the capital, it would be a serious problem if the host was late but here in Zoltan, it was swept under the rug with just a joke.

I thanked the people who had gathered while scratching my head and started the dinner party.

“Today’s meal was made by mom and her friends!”

Tanta boasted about his mother’s cooking like he was the one who made it. He smiled happily with a “Right?” when told that it was delicious.

There was no after effects remaining from Tanta's White Eye Disease.

He helped Gonz and his father while smiling brightly like before with his eyes sparkling like a usual youngster.

Doctor Nyuman commented that it was great that the medication was administered swiftly and thanked me.

"I think I've sent in an order sheet but did you receive it?"

"Yeah, I will deliver it to you as soon as possible tomorrow evening."

Doctor Nyuman was my first customer.

He promised me that he would order the medicinal herbs he lacks on a regular basis.

He even put in a good word for me when I registered my apothecary business with the Merchant Guild and they actually waived the interest and first-year membership fee when I borrowed start-up funds from the Merchant Guild.

I was thankful for that since even though I didn't have to pay for the workmanship, most of my savings was spent on paying for the materials.

I no longer had to worry if my business permit would be withdrawn when I fail to pay the guild membership fees during my first year.

It was a great first step.

"Oi~ Do you have any aspirations or what not?"

Gonz called out to me.

Aspirations huh... I can't say any if you ask me so suddenly.

But as everyone's focus was on me, I had to say something.

"Eh – let me see..."

I wanted to put together my thoughts but I decided to stop.

I should stop putting up appearances. I was no longer a Knight after all.

“Thank you, everyone, for helping me fulfill my dream. But I wish to enjoy my time leisurely and run my apothecary without pushing myself. Especially for hot days like today, I want to drink something like cold tea and have a leisurely chat with everyone. That’s why, even after the shop starts business, please feel free to drop by for a chat.”

Everyone laughed and gave resounding claps.

Thus, my apothecary slow life in Zoltan began.

Chapter 6

The Hero Lit and the Ordinary Red

News of the Hero Ruti assaulting the second Four Heavenly Kings, [Gandor of the Wind], at his residence, the Flying Castle, had finally reached Zoltan.

It was said that Gandor held supreme military strength with his aerial forces consisting of countless Wyvern Riders and that at least five times the number of troops were needed to be able to compete with him but that battle would definitely weaken the Demon Lord's Army.

"Looks like Ruti that girl is working hard."

I felt how distant the threat of the Demon Lord Army was from the remote frontier Zoltan. The people of Zoltan were also delighted with the victory of the allied forces but as it was a distant threat, it was more apt to call it a festive delight.

[Chime] The sound interrupted my thought process. It came from the bell I attached to the door.

"Welco... oh, it's Gonz and Tanta."

"Yo, we came to visit, there aren't any customers as usual huh."

"Leave me alone."

It was raining outside. A carpenter's work would be put on hold whenever it rained.

Around this season, it often rained between noon and evening. The daytime temperature could even go past 37°C so basically during that time of the year, most of the people in Zoltan couldn't put in the spirit to work.

Adventurers also didn't want to work in the heat compounded with the fact that it might suddenly rain so many of them saved up money between winter and spring and chose to take a break from work during summer.

However, it wasn't as if plundering races like goblins, bandits or outlaws would stop their activities either so in order to cope with that, the guild had to recruit high ranking Adventurers with a sense of responsibility like Albert.

I had just started procuring products for my own shop so I had almost not done any adventuring lately.

More pressingly, I had to do something about the urgent issue of my shop having rarely any customers come by.

"It's only been half a year but your earning has gone up moderately right?"

"Well, it's because of Nyuman's recommendations that I'm wholesaling to the other hospitals too. But..."

"Regular customers aren't coming huh? Well, during this season everyone's probably hiding in their homes and they most likely don't even have the willpower to walk to an apothecary."

"Even though I went out of my way to prepare summer cold medicine."

Even medicine have an expiration date too. After a couple of months, I would have to discard any compounded medicine or harvested medicinal herbs.

Even though the purchase price at the Adventurer's Guild was below one-fifth of the selling price, my stomach still hurt compared to when I sold everything I harvested to the Adventurer's Guild.

"Don't worry, your number of customers will increase eventually."

Gonz laughed loudly but to me, it wasn't a laughing matter.

"By the way, Red, have you eaten?"

"Nope."

"Great, then let's go eat somewhere."

“It’s okay, I’m refraining from eating out. I make my own meals at home.”

“Eh? Red onii-chan can cook?”

“Yeah I can, you can’t call yourself an Adventurer if you can’t cook.”

Meals are important after all.

During a tough and arduous journey, many times I could only look forward to breakfast and lunch.

Having bland meals would be tough and I felt that I wasn’t useful in terms of combat strength so I learned just a little bit of cooking skill.

In the beginning, Ares opposed it vehemently but as it was well received by Ruti who was my first party companion, Ares stopped complaining after a couple of days. Or rather, he could still brazenly request for second servings.

Meal times were one of the few times I, the burden of the group, could be relied upon by those around me.

“Ooh, Red’s cooking?”

“Well, it can’t beat those who hold the Divine Protection of the Cook but it’s quite good for an amateur. Why don’t you give it a try?”

“Are you sure!?”

“Sure, give me a moment.”

The place where I stayed was located side-by-side to the shop.

The layout included, besides the storefront and the storeroom, there was a bedroom, kitchen, washroom, living room, a workplace to do compounding and also a garden to grow medicinal herbs.

Now that I think about it, it is quite spacious but was the number of materials I paid for actually sufficient? It’s possible that Gonz went ahead and forked out from his own pocket.

I opened the shelf I used to keep my food ingredients in the storeroom and thought

about what to make.

“Potato salad and egg toast, tomato soup... ah, maybe I should throw in the chicken meat I bought yesterday too.”

I placed the ingredients in a basket and headed to the kitchen.



“Here you go.”

I placed the dishes on the living room table.

“Oo, I was wondering if something amazing would come out but it looks normal but delicious.”

“I’m not a Cook so all I can make is regular home cooked food.”

Maybe I raised their expectations a little too much.

I claimed that my food was tasty despite just being an amateur and my cooking skill not being a big deal... oh well, it doesn’t matter.

“Thanks for the meal.”

The drinks were iced water with floating bits of sliced citrus.

I’ll prepare herbal tea after the meal. I gathered both of them while I was harvesting medicinal herbs.

Tanta had bacon and eggs while Gonz had potato salad respectively on their spoons as they brought it to their mouths.

“How is it?”

“...Seriously?”

Gonz and Tanta's movements stilled.

"Wha, what's wrong? Does it not suit your taste?"

"No... it's seriously delicious."

"You're amazing, Red onii-chan! It's tastier than mom's cooking!"

After commenting, the two of them started to move their spoons without saying a single word.

I was relieved and started on the soup.

Yup, it's tasty.

After the meal, the two of them had satisfied faces as they drank their herbal tea.

"But why is it that tasty? The cooking itself looks normal though."

"Ah, that's right. It's probably because the seasoning was good."

"Seasoning?"

The mountain had various other plants other than medicinal herbs.

Up until the middle part of the mountain was a tropical to temperate zone and if you go further towards the peak, the climate would switch to a subarctic zone so there were famous spices like mustard and garlic, cinnamon and nutmeg, and even some miscellaneous spices which I didn't know the names of which grew in rich clusters on the mountain.

I believed... seasoning made with those ingredients improved the taste.

"Heh, I never imagined that you would actually be well-informed about cooking."

"It's the basis for cooking when camping out but I don't know anything about fancy dishes or cooking using strange ingredients."

“That’s plenty. If your cooking is this good, you can even open a shop.”

“Even if you flatter me, I can only serve you tea.”

“Even this tea is delicious too.”

The herb I used to make the tea also came from the mountain.

I guessed that the herbs that went through breeding selection by the wood elves who lived in Zoltan in the past were now growing naturally in the wild on the mountain.

In this continent, many of the vegetables, fruits, and livestock went through a long process of selective breeding by the wood elves. The previous great war with the Demon Lord resulted in the annihilation of the wood elves’ country so in the present there only remained half-elves born of the union between wood elves and humans.

However, the knowledge of natural sciences they left behind have been handed down to humans. My knowledge of medicinal herbs and medicine all came from reading books left behind by the wood elves too.

A chime came from the direction of the storefront.

“There’s a customer? I’ll go over for a second. You two can sit back and relax here.”

“Sure.”

It’s rare to see a customer come in the rain.

I hastily returned to the storefront.

“Welco...”

The person who entered was a strangely dressed woman.

Her whole body was wrapped in a black coat with a hood and her mouth and neck were concealed behind a red bandana.

Flowing golden hair peeked out from the gap of her hood.

And I noticed on her waist were the handles of two greatly curved shotels adorned with gryphon feathers. *(TL: Shotel is a curved sword originating in ancient Ethiopia.)*

Every Zoltan resident would recognize her.

She was the other B-rank Adventurer. But her ability was far above that of Albert. She acted solo without forming parties with anyone else but could still obtain an evaluation corresponding to a B-rank party.

Her individual ability was probably A-rank or even above that.

Her name was Lislet. When people called her, they shorten it to Lit. It's confusing as I'm called Red but... there's no way I could complain about something so minor. *(TL: In Japanese, Lit (Ritto) and Red (Reddo) sound quite similar)*

"...Gideon, you're really here."

This time finally came as I braced myself.

Her real name was Lislet of Logavia. The second princess of the Principality of Logavia.

Although it was only for a short period in the past, she once formed a party with me and Ruti.

Chapter 7

The Princess who couldn't become the Hero's companion

I asked Gonz and Tanta to return home.

The two of them were shocked when they faced the strongest Adventurer in Zoltan and they were fairly suspicious of our relationship but I convinced them that we were discussing medicine and got them to leave.

Then, we switched location to the living room table and had a seat.

“Ah—, how do I start, here I'm known as Red.”

“I've heard you call yourself that here.”

In the past, Lislet called herself Lit and participated incognito in a coliseum and also joined the fight against the Demon Lord Army as a mercenary.

We met her at a lodging during our journey and, at first, we were at odds with each other but after saving her from a predicament once and extracting her from an encirclement from her enemies, she joined us on our adventure to find reinforcements.

She did consider the decision to join our party but in the end, we parted ways and she remained behind to defend the Principality of Logavia.

It turned out that way but I had a feeling she might have become Ruti's companion if there was a slight difference in the words chosen.

“I was a little too active so there were voices that started nominating me as the Queen instead of my younger brother, the Crown Prince, so I absconded to the frontier before it formed a rift in the household and thus I'm here to play until the matter calms

down.”

Lit and Albert do most of the high difficulty requests in Zoltan. compared to Albert who prioritizes requests from influential people and avoids requests that are not profitable, Lit takes the initiative to do tough requests so Lit had greater popularity among the masses.

But I see, with that reason she can accept worthwhile high difficulty requests and also not be troubled with money since she possesses sufficient funding from home...

“By the way, Red... Lit and Red sounds kind of close.”

“I, I guess, actually I couldn’t think of anything so I used it as a reference.”

“...Hmm~ so you used me as reference huh?”

“Sorry that it might cause confusion. But it’s a little too late to change it now so... please allow it.”

“...I’m glad!”

“Eh?”

Lit lifted the bandana wrapped around her neck to conceal the grin on her face. Now that I think about it, when we first met, she had the habit of hiding her mouth when laughing so we started to suspect that she belonged to the upper class. But we never imagined that she would actually be a Princess.

“So you actually remember me.”

“Of course, even though it was short, Lit was our companion so of course, I remember.”

Furthermore, it’s a given that it would leave an impression, seeing how she was an unprecedented princess inclined towards fighting.

“Companion... so you’ll call me one.”

Lit looked down slightly and fell silent.

When we parted, Lit said that, to her, we were 'true companions' and her first party.



In the first party she formed, in front of a powerful monster, the Scissorhand Demon, her party left her and ran away.

At that time, she met up with us who were chasing the same demon and cooperated with us to defeat it but from then on her attitude softened considerably... but not really by much as she hid her embarrassment and clung to us excessively.

Ruti found it troublesome but I found talking with Lit interesting like interacting with a small animal so I often chatted with her.

“So, Gideon... or it should be Red here, why are you here?”

“About that...”

To be honest, I didn’t really want to talk about how I was a burden and chased out but... I was confident that she wouldn’t be satisfied if I didn’t explain. And I’ll have to get her to keep quiet about me too.

There’s no helping it.

“It’s an embarrassing matter but...”

I steeled myself and said it all in one go.

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“What’s with that!”

After confiding to her, Lit snapped for some reason.

“Even though you’ve been fighting alongside them the whole time! That’s way too strange!”

“Even though you say that, Ares did have a point. It’s a fact that I was a burden.”

“That’s not a fact, Gideon had always been mindful to make sure the party runs smoothly!”

Well, I realized that my combat ability wasn't up to par so I made sure to be useful for everything else.

Matters such as cooking, managing the party member's health, gathering information for new towns, procuring consumables, managing the budget, planning the interaction with powerful authorities who wish to meet the heroes...

"Weren't you working excessively hard!?"

"That's true now that you mention it."

It didn't seem like I convinced her as Lit was growling in anger.

"Don't get so worked up. There's a possibility that I might not be able to keep up and die in the middle of battle. So it might be a blessing that I retired here in Zoltan and opened an Apothecary Shop before that happened."

"Actually, since Red who did all kinds of matters for them isn't there now, are Ruti and the others all right?"

"They should be fine, they seem to have defeated Wind from the Four Heavenly Kings after all."

Nevertheless, as Zoltan was quite distant from the frontlines, that information was likely passed through the word of mouth of a ton of people.

Of course, the fact that they defeated Wind from the Four Heavenly Kings shouldn't be false but I shouldn't expect any accuracy in terms of how they defeated it.

I would be lying if I said that I wasn't worried...

"Well, since I've been kicked out, I can't do anything even if I worry. Even though Ruti had been traveling with me the whole time, that Ares guy is there. They'll make it through somehow."

I don't deny that a part of my sentence was meant to persuade myself.

However, I was no longer Ruti's companion. With regard to my precious younger sister, I, as the elder brother... was no longer able to help her with anything.

"Let's put this conversation aside. No matter what we say here, it's not going to reach Ares' ears."

"Uu~ I guess that's true."

While pacifying Lit who still didn't seem like she was convinced, I suddenly looked at the cups placed on the table.

"The tea is already cold, I'll make it again."

"Eh, no, it's fine."

"It's our reunion after all. Unlike in the past where we drank whatever we had on hand, I want to let you drink the tea I brew properly."

In the past, because we usually camp out of out or at the frontlines, I cooked with whatever I had on hand and brewed herbal tea using the scant few types of roadside grass that can be utilized as tea leaves so it wasn't the ideal situation.

But it was different now. I researched the plants on the mountain and chose those that were not inferior to the tea commercially available at the market and instead of magically created water that tasted inorganic, I used proper clean water.

Intercepting Lit who wanted to quickly take the cup, I returned to the kitchen to brew the tea once again.

I started a fire and raised the temperature of the water in the pot until steam eventually emerged.

It was my pet theory that these tea leaves were best suited to be brewed using water that was just before its boiling point so I waited and watched the swaying water in order to not miss that moment.

I suddenly recalled my childhood memory of making hot milk for the young Ruti. As

we didn't have sugar, I dripped honey collected from the forest, causing the always frowning Ruti to show a surprised expression; she looked at me and drank half the cup in an instant, and upon realizing that there was only half remaining inside the cup, she sipped little by little reluctantly... and after she finished drinking, she gave one long satisfied sigh.

Having received the Divine Protection of the Hero since birth, Ruti had always held a farsighted view of the world but I always remember her cute child-like gesture of drinking milk.

"Now."

I removed the pot from the fire and poured the water into the teapot with tea leaves in it.

A nice scent drifted over and I gave a small nod.

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"It's delicious..."

Lit sighed in content.

Her gesture was completely different compared to what Ruti did that time but it still gave me a slight sense of satisfaction.

"Even at that time, I was secretly shocked that the heroes could eat such tasty food even when camping but now when you use proper ingredients, isn't this even more delicious than the tea from the royal court?"

"That's flattering me too much. My Cooking skill is only 1. There might be some ability correction but I can never beat those who do this as their main job."

"But..."

Lit picked up her cup once again and drank a sip.

“...So the tea you brew for my sake is this delicious.”

She muttered softly and laughed with a red face.





Lit and the Adventurers were supposed to poke the rear of the enemy formation.

The raiders of the Demon Lord Army was approaching. The commander belonged to the same race as the Demon Lord and formed the main body of the Demon Lord Army, the Asura Demon, an upper-rank demon called Shisandan who possessed six arms.

It was an unfavorable situation with many Principality forts, towns and settlements already conquered by them. It was a bold strategy aimed to turn the tides.

In charge of diverting the attention of the enemy was, Lit's swordsmanship master, the Imperial Guard Captain Gaius and the Imperial Guard.

Lit had left the castle and was rampaging out in the territory but returned to the castle in fear that it would fall to the enemy and we defended the castle with her during her predicament. However, many knights rejected her diversionary strategy. The danger was too great.

Only a single person, only Gaius supported her strategy and agreed to mobilize his own troops.

However, at that time, the real Gaius had already been killed and was replaced by Shisandan who transformed himself using magic.

Even the elite Imperial Guards couldn't match the commander and was completely annihilated.

Even though the plan was to hit the unsuspecting enemy rear, Lit's squad was instead surrounded by a fully prepared Demon Lord Army and fell into a situation where they were about to face total annihilation.

"Gaius... what have you done to my master!"

"I ate him, I needed his memories after all, 'My beloved disciple'."

Shisandan spoke using her master's voice. Lit raised a cry and charged at him. But she was overpowered by countless soldiers and held down.

“If I use your identity endeared by the people as a hero, I think I will be able to take over this country a lot easier but what do you think?”

Seeing Shisandan say that with Gaius’s face and laugh, Lit finally broke down and cried.

A special person to her was killed. And soon, many more people dear to her would be killed because of her.

Lit confided to me after the battle ended that that was the reason why she cried.

At that time, Lit said she heard the shrill sound of something cutting through the wind.

The next moment, my sword was stabbed in the shoulder of Shisandan.

“Hey, Gideon! That’s earlier than planned!”

Ares complained. It was 20 seconds before our companions reached their position in the encirclement. As I was swifter compared to my companions, I went in advance to check the condition of the enemy but I dashed out ahead of the planned timing.

I estimated that the confusion would take 10 seconds and the enemy would protect Shisandan during the remaining 10 seconds. I was separated from my companions so it became somewhat difficult to subdue Shisandan.

However,

“There’s no way I can leave Lit like that! She’s our companion!”

I cried out and began cutting down the monsters that were holding down Lit.

The sword was once the favorite sword of a Specter Knight that protected an underground tomb, a treasured sword that was said to call lightning when swung.

The blade of the drawn Thunder Waker shone in the sunset and the monsters trembled in fear and retreated just like children afraid of thunder.

We found out at the last moment that Gaius was already killed and chased after Lit.

“Gideon...”

“Don’t cry, Lit! If you are the companion of heroes, instead of tears, you should face your enemies with your sword!”

“Ye, yes!”

Lit wiped her tears with the sleeve of her muddied clothes and, with the face of a warrior, picked up her sword that had fallen on the ground.

“It should take Ruti and the others about one minute to arrive so until then, our task is to prevent Gaius... the astral demon from escaping, can you do it?”

“I can!”

“Very well then!”

We started slashing Shisandan who was still panicking.

“Hero!?”

Shisandan cried as he saw Ruti running over.

Even though she had not reached our side, the aura of the hero probably already blunt Shisandan’s swordsmanship.

While protecting each other’s back, we barked at the countless Demon Lord Army troops approaching from all sides and brandished our swords.

Chapter 8

The Hero Lit wants to help

Before I knew it, the position of the sun had dropped quite considerably.

The sun would probably be dyed red soon and dusk would fall on the town of Zoltan.

We had been rambling on about idle talk while seated across the table.

“Hey, Red.”

“What is it, Lit?”

Lit stared into my eyes.

“Could I work in this shop too?”

“Eh?”

I involuntarily made an idiotic sound. I didn’t expect those words at all.

“Red & Lit’s Apothecary Shop. Don’t you think the name rhymes well?”

“Wa, wait a minute. You are one of the only two B-rank Adventurer in Zoltan.”

“I’ll retire from being an Adventurer.”

“No no no, just wait a minute!”

Just what was Lit talking about.

She actually wants to work at a shop that no customers came in from noon until evening?

“As you have noticed, this shop has just only opened and it’s not thriving. I can’t afford to hire people.”

“But who would take care of the shop when you set off to harvest medicinal herbs? It would be a waste to close your shop during those times.”

“Uh, well, that’s true but, in the first place, customers...”

“Customers or what not, it’s because you just opened your shop recently. That will only go up from now. Let me see the interior for a bit.”

“Hmm huh?”

Lit started walking into my shop with a know-it-all look on her face.

“One counter, display shelves on both sides. Hmm hmm it sure is simplistic.”

“It’s because the ones on display are those common medicinal herbs. A couple of rarer one have to be stored properly so they are either stored in the storage or planted in the garden.”

“The workplace is wide enough so you can also increase the number of Herbalist by about two more.”

“Hiring a skilled practitioner would be expensive so I don’t have such plans for now.”

“There’s also a kitchen, washroom, bedroom, and the living room we’ve been in since just now. It’s quite a nice place.”

“Right?”

Lit nodded as she muttered to herself.

Listening closely, it seemed like she was doing calculations.

“Taking Zoltan’s economic scale and Red’s ability into consideration, your monthly revenue, after deduction expenses, maintenance fee and tax, should be about 180 Peryl in silver coins.”

“What!?!... Only that much?”

Just two days work of harvesting medicinal herbs and selling them directly to the Adventurers Guild would give me about 100 Peryl.

To think that the monthly revenue for the shop would only be 180 Peryl.

“Seriously? I’m harvesting the medicinal herbs myself so there are no material cost though?”

“Medicinal herbs don’t cost much in the first place. Unlike the guild which wholesales to the Apothecaries, if you’re selling to customers and physicians, it would take some time before the medicinal herbs you harvest gets sold out. Most of the time, it should probably be sufficient if you set off to harvest medicinal herbs once a month.”

“Ughh.”

It’s that hard to sell?

But medicinal herbs has various uses.

“To begin with, Red quickly became a Knight and went on an adventure with heroes soon after that so you might have forgotten but an ordinary person’s monthly expenditure is only about 30 Peryl.”

“Yeah, I know that but...”

“An ordinary Apothecary can be considered prosperous if it can turn a profit of 150 Peryl a month. The 180 Peryl I spoke of is an estimate assuming we spread awareness of this shop to the neighbouring residents and are able to fully exhibit the potential of this shop.”

The Adventurers Guild sells the medicinal herb they purchase to Apothecaries and merchants at even higher prices.

I thought that I could turn a profit if I sold it directly but now that I think about it, the Adventurers Guild has been selling all along so they already have their sales channel.

For an individual business, even with a medicine stockpile, it would take quite some time before it is sold out.

I thought I would be set on my path once I got my shop but it seems like my thinking was too naive.

“Nevertheless, that’s right, 30 Peryl is enough for living expenses huh?”

Just like Lit mentioned, I quickly became a knight and smoothly advanced to become the deputy captain of the Bahamut Knights Order.

My monthly living expenses at that time was 3000 Peryl. I lived a life with treatment similar to upper aristocracy. I lived in a mansion on the premises of the imperial court and I even had maids to take care of me.

During my journey with Ruti, our income was in the tens of thousands of Peryl earned from the loot taken from our battles with the Demon Lord army as well as dungeon treasures so we could use expensive elixirs and replace weapons made from rare ores one after the other and as such our expenses reached a ridiculous situation.

Perhaps my sense of money was a little numbed.

“I see... but I’m surprised how knowledgeable you are in this field.”

“I am still a princess after all so I’ve studied hard at the imperial court. Moreover, I have served as the guard for all kinds of shops after coming out to the world you know? I heard about the management of shops from the shop owners.”

She puffed her chest out proudly. That action reminded me of the unyielding Lit from when I first met her so I unintentionally laughed.

“Also, that’s right. It would be great if you have some kind of medicine that nobody else have... perhaps some compounding recipe that a Herbalist without the main profession like Red can utilize...”

“Hn, I probably have some novel ones.”

“Eh, you do?”

To be honest, developing a compounding recipe is unrelated to the skill. A recipe

purely relies on knowledge while the skill only comes into the picture during the compounding steps.

However, even if you find a useful recipe, without the corresponding compounding level, you won't be able to actually complete it so realistically, people typically don't develop new compounding recipe unless they hold the Divine Protection for Alchemist or Herbalist.

On the other hand, having no unique skills, I continued to explore what I could do. And during my journey, I had the opportunity to encounter many literature with the knowledge of the present, past and ancient Elves.

I'm confident that I won't lose to people with Alchemist or such as their main profession in terms of compounding knowledge. Although it would be troublesome if I said this to anyone so I've never talked about it.

"I think I kept them in the storage."

Even with abundant knowledge, it doesn't change that fact that the medicine that can be made without the respective skill is limited. Even the ancient elves did not research on compounding without the skill. Because of that, what I make was quite original. Applying knowledge across the times, I created items that can be compounded using generic elementary compounding skills.

Lit and I switched location to the storage.

"The original medicine that can be made in Zoltan are these two."

What I took out of was gray medicine inside a cheap-looking potion bottle and a small pill the size of a little finger.

"What are their effects?"

"I call this potion the Multiplying Potion."

"Mul, Multiplying Potion?"

“Yup, if you combine this with a Magic Potion that can be bought off-the-shelf at a five to one ratio and mix well, after equally distributing it, you will have multiplied your original potion to five potions.”

A Magic Potion is not made from medicinal herb but from containing spells in the potion. Whiteberry is commonly used as the catalyst for Magic Potions.

Whiteberry in its original form has no special effects on the human body but by extracting the liquid from the Whiteberry and using it in combination with other ingredients according to the spell you wish to store, it can contain that particular spell. In essence, drinking the Magic Potion is equivalent to obtaining the effect of the activation of that particular spell.

However, as the effects are restricted to having to drink the potion, the spells that are turned into potions are typically treatment and support spell. Even if you make a Magic Potion with an offensive spell, there won't be any effects unless you can make the opponent drink it.

However, the price for Magic Potions are overwhelmingly high and even the ones with level 1 Healing Magic, the Cure Potions that can be found circulating in any town can go for 50 Peryl so ordinary people, underling mercenaries and guards only use it as emergency medicine when there is a danger to their life.

Although once Adventurers reach C-rank and above, they would drink this medicine after the end of every battle like they are bathing in it as they challenge strong foes.

“The material cost for the Multiplying Potion is about 5 Peryl. If we put it on the market... er, erm, I think we could sell it for four times as much at about 20 Peryl. Considering how this can create four of the Extra Cure Potions that goes for 750 Peryl at market rate, it should... er... sell... but...”

Lit held the Multiplying Potion in her hands as she stared at it with a frown.

Ehh, I thought this would be ground-breaking. Even during my journey, I could multiply our Extra Cure Potions and Magic Power Potions and even Ares used it obediently without any complaints.

“This... can’t be sold.”

“No way... what’s wrong with it?”

I slumped my shoulders. I had confidence in it but is it that bad?

“Rather than bad, selling this would cause a huge change in the prices of potions! Since purchases would become one-fifth of the previous amounts!”

“But, but I am the only one capable of making it so it should be fine.”

“Just the existence of this potion alone is a huge problem... once this gets into the market, the Adventurers Guild, the Merchants Guild, the Magicians Guild, the Holy Church, and possibly even the Thieves Guild won’t stay silent.”

I was about to laugh but Lit’s expression showed that she wasn’t joking.

“But it’s just a potion? It isn’t a Magic Item that surpasses 10 thousand Peryl in price.”

“Such Magic Items are order-made single articles. This involves potions that are cheap and anybody can use which would affect the economy.”

Lit who was glaring at me with a troubled look suddenly relaxed.

“Puu... hahahhaha!!”

She suddenly laughed loudly and slapped my shoulder.

I was completely dumbfounded.

“Sorry, but I’m relieved.”

“Relieved?”

“In my eyes, you have always been an amazing person, always calm, capable of all kinds of things, able to cut through a terrifying battle with the Demon Lord army with a composed expression... Even when I thought that I had reached my end, you

appeared like lightning and saved me... I always felt that there was a distance between us."

"That's exaggerating matters."

"No, Red, you are an impressive person. Just by utilizing the right connections to gift this potion to the world, you will be able to save a lot of people and contribute to the war against the Demon Lord army. However, until just moments ago, I never imagined that you would have things you are unaware of or lack."

Lit found something hilarious as she was laughing until her tears flowed.

I never imagined that my image within Lit was beautified to that extent. When I first met Lit, my combat ability had already become inferior to my companions. Even after saving Lit, I was scolded badly by Ares and Danan for running ahead.

"Disillusioned?"

"No, I want to be with you even more now."

Lit had stopped laughing and she raised her bandana with her finger to cover her mouth and averted her eyes. Her ears were somewhat red.

I also looked away and 'Ah, um' fumbled with my words as I scratched the back of my head.

"Ah, yeah, I guess it would be difficult for me to run a business on my own."

That's right, I'll admit it. I didn't dislike the affection she displayed towards me. On the contrary, I think I was so happy that it surprised myself.

I'm sure that it was because Lit thought of me as her companion from when I was Gideon. For me, having been denied my worth and chased out from my party, Lit's recognition... made me feel that the journey I made while desperately chasing after the backs of others, while knowing that I was a hindrance, was not meaningless.

"I don't mind if you only come by when you have the time... and I can't afford a large

sum for your salary but... I would be delighted to have your help.”

“Mmm!”

This time, Lit didn’t cover her mouth with the bandana and showed me a toothy smile.

Chapter 9

Let's live happily together

Lit was overenthusiastic and wanted to return to the living room but I still had not shown her one other medicine.

“Eh, erm, this pill here, I created it after coming to Zoltan.”

“Please don't tell me you made a medicine that has the same effect as an Extra Cure Potion or what not.”

“That's impossible. This is a new kind of anesthesia.”

“Anesthesia?”

“It has the same effect as the ones available but I reduced the component that causes addiction.”

The anesthesia used in surgical treatment has a high addictive effect and many patients end up with drug addiction even after their treatment. Nevertheless, treating without anesthesia would cause the Adventurers unbearable pain and there would even be a possibility of death due to shock from the pain and loss of blood.

Anesthesia was an absolutely crucial drug to have even after taking the risk of addiction into consideration.

“But don't you think it would be better if the drug didn't cause addiction? I read about such a drug in the journal of an Adventurer who traveled to the Dark Continent but the ingredients are not native to Zoltan. They might have been brought in by the Elves. Well, either way, it's a new kind of anesthesia. Citizens probably wouldn't need this so I wanted to sell it to doctors and Adventurers but... what do you think?”

“Yeah, this should be fine. I think it will bring it decent profit... but we should get the approval from the Parliament first before selling it.”

“Parliament?”

“Even though it has low addictive content, it can still cause addiction so there definitely will be people who think of using it as a narcotic. That’s why it is better to get the Parliament to approve of its effects first instead of taking the risk that they might release an order to prevent the sales of the drug.”

“That’s certainly true.”

“I can’t predict the sales we would get from a new drug. But I think we will get quite a decent amount of income if we monopolize all the anesthetic needs of this town. If that happens, we might not even be able to keep up with the demand.”

“Well it only requires Elementary Compounding so we can increase the production just by hiring workers.”

Lit stopped in her tracks when she heard those words.

“Oh right, I forgot about how amazing Red is. So it’s a drug made using just Elementary Compounding.”

Highly effective anesthesia mostly require Intermediate Compounding skill. So in that sense, this drug was quite well suited for me...

“Even though the drug itself is amazing, the fact that it can be compounded without the regular Divine Protection holders might pose a problem...”

“Re, really?”

“But the townsmen shouldn’t be aware of Red’s unique Divine Protection. I think it will be fine as long as we claim that Red has a Divine Protection that allows you to utilize Intermediate Compounding when we put the drug up for sale.”

“But people with the advanced Herbalist skill, Compound Analysis, would be able to glean the compounding recipe by investigating the drug.”

“Red, you seriously have an abundance of knowledge regarding Divine Protections. People normally won’t know the unique advanced skills of other Divine Protections.”

After all, you can know the hands your opponent have if you know about their Divine

Protection.

Divine Protections, except for some rare exceptions, are the same in monsters as well.

There are some race-specific Divine Protections but most of the others are similar to the ones humans have. In the monster world, in particular, Warrior, Barbarian, Thief, Sorcerer, and Adept(Shaman), these five are especially common and by knowing as much as you can about these Divine Protections, it is possible to predict the fighting style of the enemy.

Especially in my case, I can't rely on my skills so this was the result of me covering up for my deficiencies using knowledge. I even noticed from an early stage that Lit here had the Divine Protection of Spirit Scout and her trump card was Spirit Magic.

There were times when combat became too difficult for the party and I served to grasp the ability of the enemy attacking us and conveyed the strategy to defeat them to my companions.

Well, that only lasted until the number of Asura Demon enemies from the main army of the Demon Lord's Army with their exception from the law of the Divine Protection started increasing. Those demons were the only existences that didn't have Divine Protection, even animals had it. They were called the failed creation of the gods.

That's why, in exchange for not possessing any Divine Protection, they fused with other Asura Demons to acquire new abilities.

I have no idea if that information was true but it is a fact that the Asura Demons possess a skill system that is different from the one I know.

"Well, there shouldn't be any Herbalist with Advanced Skill in Zoltan. We should be fine as long as the sales are limited to within Zoltan. With the amount you can make alone, there shouldn't be much left that we can sell to the peddlers."

"Great. Then, I'll tell the customers that I have a Divine Protection that allows me to use some Intermediate Compounding if they ask."

"Thanks. But then they might ask why we don't display any medicine that is made using Intermediate Compounding."

"Well, I won't proactively go out of my way to tell lies."

It would be better to not lie. Since I won't have to worry that the lie would be revealed if I don't lie in the first place.

Silence is golden, I think a past hero said that.

"From the past hero right?"

Lit said emotionally. It's close to a fairy tale of a past hero from when the Wood Elves maintained hegemony in the continent. Many people question the existence of that hero but once an actual hero, Ruti, appeared, it verified the existence of the Divine Protection of the Hero so people started re-evaluating the past hero.

Even now, archeologist and bards were traveling in search of records and stories of the hero in the libraries of old towns or on walls of fallen cities.

"But that's a topic that is completely unrelated to me."

That's right, for me, such topics no longer have any relation to me.



It looked like we've talked for quite long in the storeroom.

The sun had already set before we knew it and the night was already about to consume the last remnants of the red glow on the horizon.

"Oh right, want to have dinner?"

"Yes!"

Getting such an enthusiastic response made me even happier to cook and I psyched myself.

I returned to the kitchen and pondered on what to make.

"Oh right, I didn't go grocery shopping. If it's what I have on hand..."

I chopped up some chicken thigh meat and boiled it with water and grated ginger. After the meat was tenderized, I added a potato sliced in half and a boiled egg.

After the potato turned soft, I added pasta in and adjusted the flavor with salt and herbs... it's complete.

Southern style soup pasta.

When journeying, it would be a waste to throw away the water after cooking the pasta so most of the time I made soup pasta. That was also the recipe I chose given the current circumstances. I hope that Lit would like it.

After coming to Zoltan, I rarely had the chance to cook for others.

I carried the dishes with a slightly nervous heart.



"Delicious!"

"That's good."

Having removed the bandana from her neck, Lit was seated at the table as she deliciously ate my cooking.

It's a delight to see people eat my cooking deliciously after all.

"I'll get to eat Red's cooking every day from today on."

"Hn? Yeah."

Looks like she plans to come over to eat every day.

Well, preparing meals for my companion is one of my joys in life so I guess it's fine.

"About what time do you eat in the morning?"

"Hn, let me see, maybe 7.30?"

“Then I’ll have to make sure to get up early. After becoming an Adventurer, I’ve had days where I had nothing to do and ended up sleeping in.”

It seems like she plans to eat breakfast too. In other words, she plans to eat all three meals here? Since I can’t pay her a decent salary, I guess I can at least prepare meals for her.

Looks like meal times would be enjoyable from tomorrow onward.

“Oh right, I’ll pay for it so let’s make a bath.”

“Bath? I would be glad to have one but I’ll feel bad to have you pay for it.”

“It’s fine, I’ll use it too after all.”

...It looks like she plans to bathe here too.

Hn — ?

“I noticed that you only have one single bed. We’ll have to go shop for a bed tomorrow.”

“H, huh?”

“I have my personal belonging with me in my item box anyway. I guess I can just leave the furniture in my previous house.”

It’s getting out of hand, it’s as if...

“Haha, it’s as if you plan to stay here.”

“Haha, of course I’ll be moving to your house.”

“Eh?”

“Eh?”

Wait a minute, when did it become set that she would be moving in? Well, the building is attached to the shop so it seems quite large but the living space itself isn’t that much.

“Didn’t I say it since the beginning? I’ll retire from adventuring and work here.”

“Yeah, you said that... eh? Why does that lead to moving here?”

“Since I’ll be working here after retiring from adventuring, it will be a lot more convenient if I live here right?”

“I, I see, is that so?”

“Yes.”

“Really?”

Really?

Erm, in short... Lit will be living in my house.

“...H, huh? No no wait wait, isn’t that a bad idea?”

“Why?”

“Because, well, there will be all kinds of matter to consider if we live together.”

“Don’t be so uptight, aren’t we buddies who slept in the same tent in the past? We’ll be further apart compared to that time.”

“Well, of course, everyone would sleep together when camping out.”

“Then it’s the same right, we’re ‘companions’ after all?”

“Hn? Huh? Well, we’re certainly companions.”

“Then it’s fine for us to sleep in the same room.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, really.”

Really?

“Well then, I’ll be washing up so I’ll be using your washroom.”

“Ah, okay, do you have a change of clothes?”

“I always have them in my item box.”

“Then what would you do with the ones you’re wearing?”

“There’s a wonderful garden here so maybe I’ll sun them tomorrow when I have the time.

“Hn, shall I help?”

“It’s fine it’s fine... really?”

“Yeah, I’ll hang it out to dry in the morning.”

...By the way, are we going to sleep in the same room?

Well, I certainly only have one bedroom after all.

Chapter 10

The first morning the two spent together

The next day.

When I woke up, I turned my head as I felt the hard floor on my back while cramped inside a narrow sleeping bag.

“...Oh yeah.”

Looking at Lit sleeping soundly on the bed, I smiled bitterly to myself as I recalled the conversation we had yesterday.

We had a disagreement on who would sleep on the bed last night when it was time to sleep.

Naturally, Lit offered to sleep on the floor while I also insisted on sleeping on the floor.

We reached a meaningless conclusion along the lines of ‘Let’s both sleep on the floor then.’ after an hour so in the end, I won in scissors-paper-stone and slept on the floor.

“What a fruitless quarrel.”

I was already used to camping out so sleeping in a sleeping bag was not a big deal to me.

Now that I think about it, it wouldn’t have been an issue if I slept on the bed either.

“Well, there’s no point thinking about the past. I guess I’ll prepare breakfast.”

During summer in Zoltan, the days were hot even from the morning. It was already autumn in other places but it would take another month before Zoltan entered autumn.

Cicada cries could be heard from outside and I half found it irritating but also half found that it gave elegance to the summer season as I crawled out of the sleeping bag and headed to the washroom.

“Uhyaa, it’s warm?”

The water stored in the water jug did not cool down during the night and was instead slightly warm.

“Ah~ It would be the Zoltan’s way of living to laze around at home during days like these.”

However, washing your face with such warm water would not be refreshing at all. I guess I’ll have to take the trouble and draw water from the well.



I balanced four water-filled jugs on the ends of two poles and carried them.

Fundamentally in Zoltan, the water from the creak was used for domestic uses. The water drawn from the well was used for drinking.

In addition, alcohol beverages like diluted wine or ale were also popular as replacement for drinking water and these alcoholic drinks were also consumed by children.

“Huff... things would be a lot different if Divine Protections capable of magic was more common...”

I placed the water jugs in a dark area in the kitchen. In such heat, placing them in direct sunlight would turn them into hot water in a blink of the eye. Maybe it was even possible to boil an egg.

“Egg huh, maybe bacon and omelet? Lettuce salad and potato soup. Oh right, I didn’t buy bread yesterday. Maybe I can use the wheat flour to make crepe and wrap the

salad and omelet in it.”

Since I had already decided on what to make, all that was left to do was make them.

Lit’s smile when eating came to mind when I was making breakfast. Looks like even though it was the first morning since Lit moved in, I had already gotten used to this lifestyle.



“Morning~”

“Oh you’re awake, morning.”

I was just about to finish cooking when Lit greeted me.

She looked at my face and grinned before heading to the washroom to wash her face.

“Ah, there’s cool water in the kitchen, you can take it.”

“It’s okay~”

I heard the chanting of a spell from the washroom. I didn’t think that she would actually bother to use magic to cool the water.

“Sure is convenient.”

Thinking of the troubles I had to go through to draw water from the well in the morning, I really envy those with Divine Protections that can utilize magic.

I placed the food on the table during that time.

“Ooh~ looks good~”

Lit had returned from the washroom. In spite of washing her face, Lit still groggily sat on the chair. She was stretching her sentences and her pajamas was also unkempt with

her shoulder showing.

“Lit, you’re not a morning person?”

“No, it’s because it was a different bed so I had some trouble sleeping.”

“I didn’t know Lit was so delicate.”

“Hum, thanks for the meal.”



Lit started eating her breakfast deliciously without answering my question. Despite saying she had a hard time falling asleep, she still looked satisfied. It didn't seem like she couldn't sleep well on my bed.

I smiled wryly and picked up a spoon.

The Zoltan lazy late summer morning passed slowly as we had small talk. She poured cool water with a lemon slice floating in it in a cup and gulped it down.

"Delicious."

I unconsciously smiled faintly as I heard her satisfied comment amidst the cicada cries.



After finishing our meal and cleaning the dishes, we drank cold tea as we discussed the plan for today.

"Should we dry the contents of your item box like mentioned yesterday?"

"Ah, we should do the important things first, I can do that anytime."

"I see, then, it would be to get your bed and essential items right?"

"No no, my bed can't fit in that room."

"...So you've been sleeping in a wonderful bed, no wonder you had a hard time sleeping."

"That wasn't the reason why I couldn't sleep but anyway, I plan to buy a new bed. But I do plan to pick up the paintings or decorations that can be placed in the shop from my house."

"Paintings?"

"Don't underestimate the power of art works okay? Placing appropriate art works will surely raise sales."

"Really?"

But it is true that a shop with a good atmosphere will have to power to draw people in.

“We can get the permission for the anesthetic alongside our shopping so maybe we can buy some gift?”

“That’s a good idea.”

Of course, it isn’t a law to have to present gifts to the official when sending in an application. There isn’t one but... it’s unusual for a country to have strict rules against it even though it might affect the decision. Not to mention in a country known to be lazy like Zoltan.

Approval of a new drug is up to the judgment of the official in-charge. It would change according to the impression we made.

“Since you are an emerging Apothecary, it might be better to bring something more expensive. Since there is no credence for your shop.”

“Okay. I’m well versed in these kinds of negotiations.”

Rather than management of shops, I used to be in charge of negotiating with the influential people in the land during our journeys. Let’s see, a gift costing about 30 peryl should suffice. Precious metals that can be sold at close to the market price are usually preferred. I guess silver tableware might be reasonable.

“Not just for the gift, maybe we should buy some tableware for Lit’s use too?”

“It’s okay. I can use the same ones as you.”

“I do have a sufficient range of tableware but it was bought for single person use. I don’t mean that we have to use separate dishes but there just purely aren’t enough.”

“Okay then if that’s the case. I’ll pay for it since it will be for my use.”

“Please don’t buy any high-class tableware. I can pay for it since I’ll be using it too.”

Since I've been accustomed to living frugally, washing up would be terrifying if there were high-class tableware.

You might laugh at me and call me timid but if the plates in my hand equate to half a year's worth of income, I would treat it excessively tenderly and the efficiency when doing housework would drop.

"You don't need to treat it tenderly even if it is high-class tableware. Tableware are consumables after all."

"Nevertheless."

Moreover, I also did budget management during the journey. I was a little strict with money.

"I'll follow your suggestion then. Next would be my salary."

"...Yeah."

I swallowed nervously. I don't think that she won't ask for an unreasonable amount but...

"How about a daily pay of 1.5 so it would turn out to be about 30 peryl in most months? Furthermore, since meals and accommodations are included, I think it is reasonable?"

I think it's a little less compared to the pay for shop workers but like she said, food and accommodations were included so it could be said to be a sufficient amount.

But Lit was a B-rank Adventurer. Her previous monthly income should exceed ten thousand... 30 peryl, in terms of her assets, was probably nothing.

However...

"All right, let's go with that."

It would have weighed down on me if she said that she didn't need any pay. I felt that

I should somehow repay her as long as she worked for me. If Lit said that she didn't need any remuneration, I would have tried to pay her a salary no matter what. I was aware that I was that kind of person.

And that sum would most likely be greater than 30 peryl a month.

That's why it actually helped me when Lit quoted a sum according to the market price.

Ah, perhaps she said that she wanted to live in this house so that I won't have to worry that much about the salary I pay her?

Don't tell me Lit thought it out from the start!

"Thank you, Lit."

"Eh? Ah, yeah, you're welcome?"

She gave a blank look but as expected of an Adventurer who solved Zoltan's problems in a solo party.

I didn't say anymore and thanked Lit once again in my heart.

Chapter 11

The Half-Orc's downtown furniture store

Lit and I walked side-by-side as we headed to the furniture store to buy a bed.

In Zoltan during summer, it was an unspoken convention to move about during the morning and evening and quietly stay at home during the afternoon.

For that reason, Zoltan's street was bustling with activity even though it was in the morning. Nevertheless, everyone was drenched in sweat and had expressions that said it was bothersome so it was a far cry from the word 'bustling with activity'.

"Has Lit gotten used to Zoltan?"

"You mean this atmosphere? Nope, I was confused by it a lot of times. Are everyone from the hotter regions like this?"

"No, even though they are located in the same subtropical region, in the Silver town Musari, miners head to the mines to mine silver ores in the morning, people gather to cook lunch for the miners during the afternoon and at night after finishing work they all get a beer and sing together. It was a lively town."

"So Red has been to Musari too?"

"To get my hands on Mithril Ingots. I've been to all kinds of places but I never thought that I would come to Zoltan."

It is a country located far away from the battle against the Demon Lord army and a large majority of the land is undeveloped land with no benefit in invading. Much of the country is wetlands so it is not suitable for agriculture and the vegetation is only shrubs with the trees limited to the mountains.

The country's participation in the war against the Demon Lord army was limited to giving support by sending a small amount of funding to the central region and there have almost never been any expeditions of troops sent to the frontlines.

The country does have any specialty product that others don't have, the technology

level is low and the monsters are not too strong either.

The fact that B-rank Adventurers were needed to fight the Owl Bear that appears on a daily basis in the central area mountainous regions serves as evidence to show the lack of strong enemies for the Adventurers in this land.

“In other words, it is peaceful. It is a country that doesn’t need a hero. I believed that it was a country that had no relation to myself when I was in the hero party.”

“A country that doesn’t need a hero huh, that’s certainly true.”

A half-elf girl sitting by the window with her feet in a pail of water noticed me and waved.

If I remembered correctly, she was a child I applied medication to her knees when she fell down and scraped it.

“I... occasionally found that I was unsatisfied.”

Lit said while looking at the situation.

“Really?”

“But I, at that time, did not go with you all. I believed that if I journeyed together with you all, I guess that it would surely have been a choice that I would be satisfied with but... now, I don’t know the answer to that anymore.”

”.....”

There probably was a future where Lit journeyed with Ruti and the others to subdue the Demon Lord.

But that didn’t happen.

We were not on the path of heroes advancing through blood but merely Lit and Red walking in Zoltan.

Stormthunder Furniture Store.

It had a strange name but the store belonged to a furniture craftsman with good skill.

“Stom, you in?”

After Lit shouted, a stocky figure appeared from behind the store. He had a nose that looked like a boar, his height was slightly shorter than humans but he had a muscular body that spanned wide laterally with tusks protruding out of his mouth, emphasizing his terrifying outer appearance.

“So it’s Lit-sama, thank you for your continued patronage... but why is Red here?”

“Ah, well, a lot happened.”

Stom, or rather, Stormthunder tilted his short neck at the unexpected grouping of the best Adventurer in town and the herb gathering specialist.

“I will be living in Red’s house from today onward.”

“Ha?”

“That’s why I came to buy a bed today.”

“O, ooo, th, I guess it’s congratulations? I didn’t know this happened, rather, Red is a lucky man.”

“No, wait a moment, aren’t you misunderstanding something?”

“A bed order right? Leave it to this Stormthunder.”

Stormthunder rubbed his hands and bowed his head repeatedly to Lit in a servile manner.

“Hey Stothun, aren’t you acting completely different compared to when you served

me?”

“Of course there would be a difference serving a customer who spends 30 minutes slashing prices on a cheap bed compared to a customer that buys a high-class bed at the asking price!”

“...I guess so.”

I had no words to retort Stormthunder’s fed up reply. He was certainly right.

Stormthunder is a Half-Orc. A race with mixed blood between human and Orcs.

In this Half-Orc case, his parents were not human and Orc but there was some Orc blood mixed with his ancestors which had not completely thinned out yet.

Orcs are a race from the Dark Continent with a boar-like face and they form a part of the army with foot soldiers and cavalry in the war due to their fondness for fighting.

Every time a war happens between the two large continents, many of their children would be born on this continent.

Regardless of having been born of the fierce and cruel parent that serve as the vanguard of the Demon Lord Army, the disposition of Half-Orcs are no different from that of humans. Nevertheless, due to their outer appearances and origin, many of them are forced to live in poverty and resort to becoming thugs for the underworld or robbing band of mercenaries that make a living by plundering.

Stormthunder’s name was originally made up of words from the Dark Continent that referred to storm and thunder but he converted it to this continent’s language. I and the downtown people shorten his name and call him Stothun. Although the person himself wasn’t really fond of that nickname. *(TL: Pronounced ‘Sto’ from ‘Storm’ and ‘Sun’ from ‘Sunder’ as thunder in Japanese is pronounced as ‘SanDar’)*

“So, how wide is the room in which you plan to place the bed?”

Stormthunder bent his rugged body to a low posture in a servile manner that which he had never shown me.

I looked away from the reality of the downtown craftsman who was usually critical with his words and surveyed the furniture displayed within the store.

They were all furniture made of wood and there was a wide range available, from elaborate ones to plain ones. There were beds made from sturdy oak, exquisite black ebony, rare ironwood, but among all those, the one that stood out the most was one made with living wood which possesses great vitality and even after it has been processed into furniture, just spraying some water would be enough to mend any damage to the wood.

As something that could be used for many years, it was a product that was popular among the middle-class but the crafting difficulty was high as it requires a craftsman to have the skill called Intermediate Furniture Creation skill so it was usually not obtainable in a town the scale of Zoltan.

“Hey, don’t touch it if you don’t plan to buy it!”

“It can heal even if it’s injured anyway?”

“Regardless of that, I won’t forgive you if you damage it!”

Stormthunder complained when he saw me lightly tap the living wood bed. I shrugged and obediently left.

After a while, Lit called out to me.

“I’ve decided on this walnut double bed.”

“Please make it a single bed.”

I didn’t miss the quiet mutterings of Stormthunder who said ‘good-for-nothing’.

When I glared at him, he averted his eyes in panic and escaped to the back of the store saying that he would bring a single bed with the same design over.

“Good-for-nothing.”

Lit was laughing with a grin but she also said that with a flushed face.

“It’s only been two days since we reunited you know?”

I said that for now with an ambiguous tone... but double bed huh.

To be honest, I didn’t know what to do during this sort of experience.



“Zoltan has surprisingly many Half-Orcs.”

The purchased bed would apparently be delivered in the evening. We moved one statue that was likely to fit in the store, a couple of paintings, and one set of good quality table and chair from Lit’s old apartment onto a carriage and brought it with us. An Earth Spirit Beast that Lit summoned was pulling the carriage.

Lit’s mansion was a luxurious one befitting the best Adventurer in town with four bedrooms, a private bar, a hidden door to a secret room and a hidden path to escape when the need arises, separate toilet and washroom, and even a relaxing bathhouse too.

Currently, the mansion was used by two servants that she hired and I heard that she lent the mansion to merchants for meetings. It was sad to know that her income from that was greater than her current pay.

“Red?”

“A, ah, sorry, were you talking to me?”

“Sheesh, I was saying that Zoltan had surprisingly many Half-Orcs.”

Half-Orc huh.

It’s true that this place has more Half-Orcs compared to other countries.

“Stormthunder’s Divine Protection level as a Craftsman is high. But as a Half-Orc, he could not open a decent shop in the other countries so he flowed to Zoltan. Here it is only limited to some disgusted looks. There are also many Half Humans of Dark Continent blood who come to Zoltan because they cannot find a decent environment elsewhere.”

“I see... leaving that aside, as expected of Red, you are even knowledgeable about Divine Protection levels.”

“Actually I didn’t have enough money so I helped him with some hunting.”

“I see, non-combat Divine Protections have it tough.”

Divine Protection levels can only grow when you fight another holder of Divine Protection as well and defeat them. Individuals with non-combat Divine Protections may have nothing to do with fighting on a daily basis like the ones holding combat Divine Protections but in order to increase the power of their Divine Protections, they still have to pick up a sword and fight beasts, monsters, and humans.

Divine Protection.

In this world, all living beings, apart from the Asura Demons, are given the power of Divine Protection from birth.

It is bestowed by the Supreme God Demise who is regarded as the state religion in all countries located on this large continent. Although the form of faith is different, all beings down to the uncivilized tribes, demi-humans, and intelligent monsters revere the same god.

With a concrete god that bestows visible power through Divine Protection and with whom they can have an ambiguous conversation with through Divine Protection, there wasn’t any room to believe in other gods whose existence was unknown.

I’m repeating myself but Divine Protections are bestowed by God.

It is not affected at all by anything like parents or education. There has been precedence of orphans from the slums obtaining the Divine Protection of Strategist or General and people with royal blood obtaining the Divine Protection of Thief.

Precisely what Divine Protection would be bestowed was exactly the realm of divinity.

Divine Protections have a name, skill, and level.

Raising the level will give people points to obtain skills and obtaining skills will give superhuman strength and abilities.

These powers can extend from easily visualized abilities like magic, ability to handle weapons and armors, crafting furniture, to songs that can shake the heart or exert forces in scenes outside the realm of current knowledge. The majority of the people consider the level of a Divine Protection as a person's value.

It is safe to say that in order to achieve greatness or success, it is essential for a person to raise their Divine Protection level.

So how does one raise their Divine Protection level?

There is but one method, levels can only be raised through killing an opponent who possesses Divine Protection in battle.

This holds true to both combat Divine Protections as well as non-combat Divine Protections. Craftsman Divine Protections can never level up by crafting using their main profession.

For that sake, there are people who request for Adventurers to help them with hunting to raise their level. They will part-time as Adventurers to hunt monsters and beasts, fulfilling the law of the world that all living things will kill each other to strengthen their own Divine Protection.

The reason why a gathering of ruffians that is the Adventurers Guild could reach such great authority as an organization is because people from various organizations are all part-time members of the guild.

Looking to my side, there were two girls around the age of 13 with visible enthusiasm joking with one another in high spirits regardless of the heat.

On their backs were boorish unadorned spears. Reddish black blood that they forgot to wipe off stained the tip of the black iron blade.

This world was full of battles.

Chapter 12

The Gift from God

“Next will be tableware and miscellaneous goods.”

If we were going to be living together, I believed that there was a need to separate personal items to a certain extent.

When journeying, sharing was fundamental in order to minimize the number of items but since we were staying in a town, there was no need for that right?

“You’re worrying too much about it.”

After getting our sundries, Lit laughed and said when she heard my words. And she seemed a little unhappy with her eyebrows bent diagonally upward.

“Let’s stop by the market too. It’s about time I stock up on food ingredients.”

“Sure, I want to eat hamburgers.”

“Hamburger huh, understood.”

I still had a stockpile of eggs. I listed the ingredients in my head as we headed to the market.

It was about ten minutes walk away, at an empty plot of land that a house which was destroyed in a storm once stood.

We heard the angry screams of children.

“Sounds like a fight.”

There were mischievous kids in any country. I was troubled as to whether an adult like me who didn't know the circumstances should interfere in a children quarrel but...

"That voice sounds like Tanta."

Gonz's son, the Half-Elf Tanta. It sounded like he was in a fight.

"Somebody you know?"

"Probably. Let's go take a look."

The sounds came from an empty plot of land.

Peeking over, it looked like there was a fight between a group of three and two people.

The two people group was made up of both Half-Elves and the three-man group was all human.

Tanta was throwing punches with a human boy but the situation looked very bad.

"Skill huh?"

It looked like the boy had successfully contacted his Divine Protection. I guess he's an early bloomer. His level had already been raised to level 2 or 3.

I watched the fight and postulated the kind of Divine Protection.

I guess I should stop them. Looking closely, only the child that could use Divine Protection was raising his hand within the three-man group. The remaining two only screamed profanities from afar but they occasionally showed frightened expressions so they didn't seem like they would join the fight.

It looked like the cause of this fight was that single human boy.

"Oi, stop it!"

I called out and the children all looked over together. They showed expressions of anger, fear as well as relief at the appearance of an adult.

However,

“Shut up!”

The boy who was punching Tanta picked up a stone from the ground with a swift action and threw it at me. His action from picking up to throwing the stone flowed naturally. It looked like [Skill: Improvisational Fighting Art].

With a crisp metallic sound, the stone bounced off my Copper Sword.

The children eyes were wide in shock. Even the child who threw the sword.

“Hou.”

Conversely, I was also impressed by the unexpected stone throw by the child and inadvertently voiced out.

There was a slight numbness in my arm holding the sword. It was a sharp blow.

“That ability is dangerous in a children fight. You should go challenge monsters with the adults.”

“Shu, shut up! Says the person holding a Copper Sword!”

The boy retorted with a red face and ran away.

“Wa, wait, Ademi!”

“Don’t leave me!”

The remaining two also ran away in panic.

I sighed lightly and sheathed my sword.

To be honest, I didn't intend to draw my sword. It seemed possible to swat the stone away with my fist but that would probably have injured me. Maybe because the Divine Protection had good compatibility with the owner as, even though he was just a child who just barely unlocked his Divine Protection, that was a strike that could match an E-rank Adventurer.

"Tanta, are you all right?"

"...Yeah."

Tanta wiped his dirtied face with his sleeve in vexation. Although his sleeve was also dirty so it actually made his face dirtier.

"Look over here for a moment."

I used a towel I brought along to wipe Tanta and the other child's face.

It wiped off the dirt but there were some bruises left.

"All right, it's gone."

"Thanks..."

"Your luck was bad since your opponent had already contacted his Divine Protection. The two of you haven't right?"

The two of them nodded slightly.

"But I heard that there shouldn't be a difference even if I don't have Divine Protection when levels are still low."

"That child had good compatibility. For good and for bad."

"Compatibility?"

"Compatibility is..."

“Er, erm!”

The other boy chimed in when I was about to explain. He was a Half-Elf with fluffy curly hair, slightly rounder cheek line compared to Tanta and the corner of his eyes was slightly droopy. His eyes were a little bloodshot, possibly because he was crying.

“Hey, Tanta, who is this?”

“Ah, sorry, this is Red. My friend, he owns an Apothecary.”

“Apothecary?”

“He’s also an Adventurer.”

“Ah, no wonder.”

The child was called Al.

It was the first time I met that child. Even though I knew most of the downtown children to a certain extent.

“Red. Al’s family is from the South Marsh Ward.”

“A South Marsh child huh, that’s why I don’t remember seeing him before.”

South Marsh Ward was a residential district in the West of Zoltan. As a land reclaimed from a swamp, the foundation of the ground was weak so it wasn’t popular as a residential district.

Naturally, it became the slums where foreigners with no assets to their name gathered.

Perhaps even Al understood that fact as he faced down when the South Marsh Ward was introduced.

“You’ve injured your knee.”

Al's knee was bleeding with red blood.

I reckoned it was an injury from when he was pushed and fell down.

I took out disinfectants and bandages from my pocket.

"I'll need water too, can you walk until the well?"

"It, it's all right. It's a minor wound."

Al's face distorted in pain when I touched the wound with my hand.

Maybe the wound was deeper than it appeared.

"No need to hold back."

"Wawaa."

I placed Al on my back and started walking.

"I, I'm all right. I can walk!"

Al flailed with his arms and feet but I ignored him and carried him to the well.

◇ ◇ ◇

"It should be fine with this."

I applied the medication and wrapped it with bandages. I wrapped the bandages firmly where it hurt to fix the leg in place.

"The pain should subside if you take it easy for two to three days."

"Thank you Red-san."

I lightly patted his head and Al gave a grin.

“Red Onii-chan! Explain yourself!”

Compared to the quiet Al, Tanta shouted in excitement.

Well, it can't be helped after all.

“Why is Red-san together with her?”

“That's because...”

“That's because I'm a good friend of Red.”

“Really!?”

“That's right. We'll be living together from today on.”

“Eh!? Since when was Red Onii-chan this resourceful?”

“Hum, that's troubling.”

Oi, what are you talking about Lit, don't say weird things to children. Tanta as well, stop saying weird things. It's going to make me sad.

“Hey.”

“Hn, what's wrong Al?”

“It's regarding Divine Protections but... Red-san and Lit-san are knowledgeable about Divine Protections right?”

“Kind of.”

“That guy, the guy who beat us up, he's called Ademi.”

“You're asking about Ademi's Divine Protection?”

“Yes, Ademi might be a bastard who hates elves but he shouldn't be somebody who resorts to violence that easily. But lately, he's suddenly become short-tempered...”

“I see, maybe because he contacted his Divine Protection.”

“A person will become like that once they contact their Divine Protection?”

Al’s eyes swam with anxiety.

Divine Protections were an indispensable God’s gift for all who were born into this world.

“Do you understand what it means to contact your Divine Protection?”

“Yes! It is when you are aware of what your Divine Protection is and you are able to select your skill and grow it?”

Tanta interrupted and answered.

I patted his head. Tanta used both his hand to hold my hand on his head and laughed happily.

“Correct, you’ve been studying well.”

“It’s common knowledge.”

“And when a person contacts their Divine Protection, their personality will also be affected by their Divine Protection.”

Tanta tilted his head in confusion when he heard my words.

“What does that mean?”

“For example, a person who possesses a craftsman Divine Protection will start to like making things or a person with magic-wielding Divine Protection will have an increased appetite for knowledge. You can say a Divine Protection draws out the human representation you associate with it.”

“That’s why Ademi became short-tempered?”

Al’s expression showed that he didn’t understand and he was anxious and fearful. I

see...

“So you’ve progressed to have awareness of your Divine Protection.”

“Ye, yes... I have the Weapon Master Divine Protection.”

“Oo, that’s an amazing one.”

Weapon Master is a Warrior-type Divine Protection which allows one to reach extreme proficiency with a single weapon. According to the situation, they might sacrifice diversity in terms of the types of weapon they can use but by devoting their attention to a single weapon, their extreme proficiency can surpass warriors of the same rank who use the same weapon.

Compared to Adventurers who switch to new weapons according to what they obtain through their journey, they tend more towards soldiers or Adventurers who fight revolving around a single style.

“That Ademi child most likely has the Bar Brawler Divine Protection.”

“Bar Brawler?”

“It is a Divine Protection focused on unarmed combat in situations where one faces many opponents. They should have unique skills that allow them to utilize non-weapon objects like stones or beer bottles as weapons and skills that allow them to gain advantageous position by sending their foes flying or tumbling. If a Weapon Master is restricted to fighting unarmed with one, the Weapon Master will probably not win.”

“So that’s why he suddenly became stronger in fights...”

“And so, the problem is that Ademi has very good compatibility with his Divine Protection.”

“Compatibility?”

“Yes, compatibility. If the individual’s physical and mental qualities have good compatibility with the Divine Protection, they can exhibit stronger skills. Ademi can be said to be an exceptional genius as a Bar Brawler.”

“A genius Bar Brawler... that sounds a little questionable.”

“That’s true, there’s where the problem comes in. All is good if it is a Divine Protection that is well respected in the society but if an individual has good compatibility with anti-social Divine Protection like Thief, Bandit, Manslayer and such, it might lead to an evil lifestyle. It is the same in Ademi’s case. The Bar Brawler Divine Protection guides one to solve anything that is in their way through fighting.”

“I see... erm, would Weapon Master be all right?”

“Well it is better compared to Bar Brawler but it also gives rise to favoritism and delusional conviction towards their weapon. You will not be able to calm down without holding your weapon and you become easily enraged whenever your weapon is made a fool of.”

“Uu...”

Al looked uneasy. But that was our destiny depending on the Divine Protection we hold... or it can be said to be the role God expect us to play...

“Well, don’t be too mindful of it. It is true that the effect of the Divine Protection is strong but it doesn’t mean that you will be controlled by it. Once he gets used to his Divine Protection, Ademi will also be able to face it better. Al will also be able to reach a position where you only cherish your own weapon.

“I don’t need something like Divine Protection.”

Tanta stiffened in shock. Lit also made a serious expression.

Divine Protections were bestowed by God. It was a God-chosen gift.

Denying it was a grave blasphemous act and the offender will face the inquisition of the Holy Church. A child may be forgiven with whipping and a sermon but they might be watched from then on.

However... I knew very well the feeling of discontent towards your own Divine Protection. Al’s anxiety was natural.

No, it probably wasn’t just me. Lit holds the Divine Protection of Spirit Scout who originally held the role of scout for the forest people. The reason why she couldn’t

remain calm in the city was probably influenced by her Divine Protection that loved freedom.

There was no telling that Tanta would be gifted with a Divine Protection that matches his carpentry work. Tanta will have to wait for the day he contacts his Divine Protection with both anticipation and fear.

I did not want to wholeheartedly deny Al's feelings. Forcibly denying him might end up distorting his life.

I was a little troubled with what to say.

"Al, I do agree that it is terrifying to face your Divine Protection. Your Divine Protection decides your life after all. However, no matter what Divine Protection you possess, Al will still be Al."

"What do you mean?"

"Your Divine Protection is also just a part of you. Just like how your gentle mom will angrily nag at you with a scary face when you are young or how your father will be completely different from usual when he is drunk."

"Yeah, my father is usually scary but he is all smiles when he drinks alcohol."

"Your self is a collection of all these aspects. Your Divine Protection is the same. When you are about to be dragged in by your Divine Protection, you should not deny it, nor should you become its slave, but you should control it as a part of you. If you can do that, Al's Divine Protection will help you a lot in the future."

"Really?"

"Really, the Weapon Master Divine Protection will bring skills that improve your physical ability as well as complete immunity to fear and confusion as long as you possess your weapon."

"Fear? I, I am always made fun of my fear of the dark but can it treat that too?"

"Yeah, you will not be afraid no matter how dark it is."

Al became a little bit relieved and showed a smile.

“Thank you Red Onii-chan.”

“You’re welcome, I am usually in the Apothecary so you can come by to consult me anytime whenever you are feeling uneasy... if you are fine with a D-rank Adventurer.”

“Yeah!... Also.”

“Hmm? Are you still uneasy about something?”

“Can I come by to play even if I don’t have anything to consult you with?”

Al looked me in the eye with a slightly red face. I stroked Al’s soft curly hair.

“Sure, you can pop by for food or anything.”

“Okay!!”

Al gave a child-like sparkling smile. He had dimples on his cheeks when he smiled.

Chapter 13

The Hero Ruti is alone

Since we made a little detour, it was close to noon when we arrived at the market.

Lit and I were sweating from the heat as we gathered and bought ingredients.

“Red~ I’m done on my side.”

“Great.”

I divided the shopping tasks for the two of us by handing her a memo. The market merchants didn’t seem to have any drive because of the heat as they didn’t call out to attract customers and they had all retreated to the back of their shops in the shade while holding a hand fan. It was great because thanks to that, we didn’t get stopped and we didn’t waste any money but I still smiled wryly at the lazy atmosphere within the market which completely suited Zoltan’s style.

It seemed like Lit also had the same thoughts and given how she seldom used the market, she laughed as she found it interesting.

“In my hometown, the market felt noisy even during summer. It became a standard phrase to say ‘I experience this every day so summer fatigue won’t phase me.’”

“My hometown was in the countryside so we didn’t even have a market. We brought whatever we made at home and bartered.”

“So Red’s hometown was like that. But didn’t Red join the Knights when you were about eight years old?”

“Well yeah. So I was only in my hometown for a short childhood.”

That’s why I couldn’t say that I had anybody I was particularly close with in my hometown. I wonder if even Ruti had forgotten about me but... in the past, Ruti was always the first to welcome me back at the entrance of the village whenever I returned

home several times a year.

“Sigh, even though she took to me so much back then.”

She was probably getting along well with Ares now.

She haven't noticed at all that her brother was gone.

“...That's hard to believe though.”

“Hn?”

“I can't imagine that Ruti opening her heart to anybody else apart from Red.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I do not know anyone more frightening than her.”

“Frightening?”

I thought she was joking but Lit's expression was serious.

“Facing off against Ruti in the arena was the first time I understood the saying of having goosebumps. Compared to any type of demon, I find the Ruti then the most terrifying... That's why I couldn't believe it when I saw Red, or I should say your former name, Gideon spoil Ruti.”

“Hah~ well, her facial expression was a little hard to understand though.”

“I can't imagine Ares pampering that Ruti.”

That was quite an evaluation but Lit was seriously having doubts.

She made me feel a little anxious...

“Nevertheless, Ruti is far stronger than I am. I have no idea how the Hero Party is faring right now but they have apparently defeated the Wind Four Heavenly King so I guess they are doing well.”

“...That’s right! We’re in Zoltan after all so there’s no point worrying about it.”

Lit exclaimed as though to banish her thoughts and took my arm.

“Let’s go home.”

“Okay, let’s go.”

Since we have already distanced ourselves from the battle that would determine the fate of the world, we now lived in a separate world from the heroes.



A person from the Hero Party, Danan who possesses the Divine Protection of the Martial Artist, exclaimed in anger.

“It’s about time you give it a rest Ares! How many times have this been!”

“We can always just return to buy it if we run out of it.”

Ares, with the Divine Protection of the Sage, stated without seeming to care about Danan’s anger burst. However, his lips trembled slightly, indicating that he took offense as a Sage from being scolded like a child by the uneducated Danan.

Currently, the Hero Party was in the Bloodsand Desert aiming for the weapons left by the previous Demon Lord.

The current aim was to snatch them before the current Demon Lord army and disrupt their plans.

However, it was now the third time they ran out of water and food and had to return to the settlement. Even though they had no idea where the weapons laid, since Red, or Gideon, left the party, the number of times their supplies ran out partway through the journey had clearly risen.

“Going back and forth countless times in the same area, how many days do you think

have we spent in this desert! It was also you who failed in the negotiation with the desert residents to get their cooperation!”

“It’s the legendary weapons you know? There’s no way they can be found so easily. As for the negotiations, I did my best but the desert people in this land are pseudo-thieves that do not even obey the king in this land. If you have any complaints then you can go ahead and give it a go.”

Ares shrug his shoulders. That attitude incensed Danan even more.

“Even though you were the one who said you could replace Gideon for supplies procurement and negotiations! What do you have to say about that!”

“Unlike Gideon, I don’t have the leisure to only focus on the chores.”

Ares believed that Danan was being angry with trivial matters like usual.

However, after he saw Danan’s expression turn serious, danger signals ran through Ares’s mind. But he was way too late.

“That’s it, I will go look for Gideon. We will never progress at this rate.”

“Just wait a minute. We will be heading to the secret establishment of the current Demon Lord after this you know!? We will be troubled if you break off from the party now!”

“We will be annihilated at this rate. I only joined the party because I thought that it was the shortest path to defeat the Demon Lord. If it is no longer the shortest path, there is no longer any meaning in remaining here.”

Danan was serious. At the very least, that was how it appeared to Ares.

He sought for help and looked towards the seated Crusader Theodora but she had her arms folded and eyes closed to indicate that she didn’t want to be involved. The Assassin Tise who joined to replace Gideon had loyalty towards Ares for his invitation but would not be useful in this situation.

“Chasing Gideon out was an irreparable act Ares. You were too hasty.”

“How many times do I have to say it, I did not chase him out, he brought it up himself.”

A cynical smile showed on Danan’s scarred face.

At that moment, “Danan, are you going to search for brother?”

It was a cold voice that could freeze even Danan’s cynical smile.



“He-hero-sama. That...”

Danan, with his whole body wrapped in thick muscular armor, shrank his body back in fear in front of a single girl. It was close to the phenomenon where herbivores fall into panic and their bodily functions seem to come to a stop under the stare of a large predator that they have completely no chance of winning against.

The Hero Ruti. The girl with silver armor wrapped around her small body and the demon-conquering holy sword on her waist expressionlessly stared up at Danan who had a large build.

However, God had decided that she was the strongest person. She was the Hero granted supernatural powers in order to save the world.

Even if Danan was a Martial Artist who could cut steel with his fingers, his instinct told him that he could never win against the Hero.

Danan swallowed audibly.

“Th-the party will face total annihilation if Ares continues to manage the party. We need your brother Gideon. Even Hero-sama...”

“Even?”

“N-no, that...”

He can't do it. Danan bent his knee and it took his all just to stop himself from escaping from her gaze. It continued to wear away at the spirit of a man who survived through hundreds of live-and-death battles.

Although the silence only lasted for a little while, to Danan, it felt dozens of times longer.

“I'll allow it. Go ahead.”

“Eh?”

“Danan, you shall go search for Gideon. We will continue our journey.”

“N-no, I.”

“That’s all.”

After saying that, Ruti returned to her own personal tent.

Although they claimed that she could use a personal tent because she was the party leader, the actual reason was that even Ares could not endure spending time with Ruti in a confined space.

Other than when she was adventuring, Ruti basically acted solo. Just one single person, only Gideon was the exception.

“Wa-wait a moment Ruti!”

Ares hurriedly chased after her.

Danan exhaled deeply and sat directly in front of Theodore who still had her eyes closed.

“And so, what will you do?”

“I have no choice but to go.”

When Theodore asked, Danan replied with his shoulders slumped.

“Even though I am aware that I am the cornerstone for attacks in this party.”

“After Hero-sama.”

“Well of course Hero-sama is special. I don’t believe Hero-sama even had a period when she was weak.”

“Everybody would have a time when they were weak when their Divine Protection level was low... but I am of the same opinion. Although Ares-dono might know more since he has been in the party since the early days.”

“Ares...”

Perhaps he finally calmed down as Danan’s tone returned to his usual arrogant tone.

While stroking the scar on his cheek, Danan asked in a quiet voice.

“Do you think it is true that Ares killed Gideon because he was a nuisance?”

“Hmm.”

“It’s certain that Ares plans to get married with Hero-sama. That guy’s house is a fallen duke house so reviving his house is likely to be his long-cherished wish. The world-saving Hero and the Sage couple would definitely garner huge support. It won’t be impossible to build a duchy... we can’t deny what Yarandorara said right?”

When Gideon left, there was another companion in the Hero Party.

Yarandorara was a female High Elf with the Divine Protection [Tree Singer] which could control plants.

A week after Gideon left, she vehemently accused Ares for killing Gideon. For a whole week, she utilized the plants to gather information but there were no signs of Gideon leaving the town.

That was because Red performed measures having known about Yarandorara’s ability but she didn’t know that.

Ares broke his promise with Gideon and claimed that Gideon ran away on his own but Yarandorara didn’t believe him and left the party.

Even though her ability to control plants would not be able to display its full power in the desert, the search would have been a lot more comfortable if Yarandorara was around.

Danan didn’t believe that Ares would actually kill Gideon but... he suddenly thought about it since he was about to set off to look for Gideon.

If Gideon was murdered, Danan’s journey would never end.

“Gideon-dono is an astute person in combat. I was impressed that he could fight to that extent just by relying on common skills.”

“It was the same for me too. Gideon was a respectable tactician.”

“Didn’t you often blame him for blunders during combat in the past?”

Danan was startled and his body shivered. The arrogant giant dropped his shoulders in shame.

“I have this kind of personality after all... I won’t calm down unless I blame failure as failure... But I swear on my Divine Protection, I never once thought that Gideon was unnecessary in the party, let alone a hindrance.”

“Then you should have conveyed that properly.”

“...Then does that mean you feel that Gideon left of his own will?”

Danan snapped the branch he had in his hands in two and tossed them into the bonfire.

“Gideon-dono is a man recognized by Danan-dono, a contemporary expert in martial arts, and me, an assistant instructor in Church Knight Spear art. Regardless of how excellent Ares-dono is as a caster, he could never overturn a swordsman that two representative warriors respect.”

“That’s true!”

Theodore words also sounded like she intended those words for herself too. Danan understood that fact as well.

Gideon should be alive. He was a companion they trusted their back to and surmounted life-and-death struggles together. If they were alive, Gideon should be alive too.

There’s no way he would pass away alone before them.

“Tch, if that’s the case then I should have went to look for Gideon earlier. Then I wouldn’t have to go through such a tiresome desert.”

“That’s right, if Danan-dono talked to me earlier, I would have went to search too.”

The two of them matched gazes and smiled.

Chapter 14

New medicine

The next day.

While making breakfast for two, I thought about how much my daily life had changed this half a month.

I used to live in a poor tenement house downtown but now I have opened an apothecary of my dreams, a Princess who was a former companion came barging in to live together with me and I'm currently making breakfast for two in the kitchen of my own home.

"It sure is unexpected."

If I were to be asked if I foresaw this future, I could only reply that I totally didn't.

I imagined a future of fighting the Demon Lord together with the Hero Ruti, a future of protecting the peace in the Imperial City as the Vice-captain of the Bahamut Knights, a future of becoming a noble and gaining a modest territory around the village I was born in... I never imagined that I would settle down in the remote region of Zoltan as an owner of an apothecary shop along with a Princess.

"Oh well, it's not that bad either."

I placed the two person's share of food on the plates.

Lit who was woken up by the smell staggered over with a sleepy look.

"Rice~"

Having Lit who says that with a grin here quickly makes my day.



I finished all my shopping while we were out yesterday.

In other words, today the plan was.

“Getting the approval for Red’s medicine.”

“Don’t call it Red’s medicine, that makes it sound like it’s some dangerous drug.”

Red Drug, that sounds terrible.

“Red Lit Drug then, oh that’s right, we have to redo the sign for the shop too.”

“Do you seriously plan to change the shop’s name to Red & Lit’s Apothecary store?... If you even change the name of the shop, you won’t be able to quit that easily you know?”

“Does that mean I get to stay here for my whole life?”

Lit replied to my light jest with a crafty smile and I also smiled back.

“All right, we’ll stop by the sign shop too. Well then, about getting permission for the new analgesic drug. We bought the silver tableware yesterday so we just have to visit today.”

“It’ll be better to have an introduction letter so I can get one through my connections.”

“As expected. That’ll be a great help.”

I’ll honestly depend on her here. As the number one adventurer in Zoltan, Lit has a lot of influence.

“Red is more well-versed for the negotiation itself right?”

“Leave it to me.”

It's not like I allocated points to the negotiation-type skills to put on airs just because I don't have any unique skills.



And then, even though I proudly took it upon myself...

"No!"

I was rejected flatly.

Or rather, it didn't seem like there was even room for negotiation.

The person in charge of giving the approval for medicine was Dan, a middle-aged bureaucrat with a potbelly working in the parliament. Perhaps he was tired because his face looked haggard even though he was fat and there were eyebags under his eyes.

"Please wait a moment, my medicine is a safe drug with low addictive content, please let me explain."

"No need, leave along with that gift!"

That man welcomed us while openly displaying his feelings with his expression that it was troublesome until he received the introduction letter Lit obtained from her higher official acquaintance.

However, the moment I entered the main topic on medicine, his attitude drastically changed.

"Did something happen?"

"It-it has nothing to do with you."

We could tell that the reason for his sudden change in attitude was not us. Since his attitude changed only when we asked for permission for the medicine.

That was easily deduced but the essential question was why was he rejecting us.

(Looks like it's better if we gather some information.)

I didn't anticipate that something like this would happen so I didn't gather any information about this man called Dan. It was a situation where I had no means to approach the negotiation.

(My instincts have been dulled from living in peace for too long.)

It was probably true that a lot of my instincts had dulled because I have only been gathering medicinal plants every day. The skill granted by Divine Protection won't decrease but it will be dulled if a person does not use it with their own judgment.

It's pathetic that I wasted the introduction letter Lit went through the trouble to get for me.

We had no choice but to leave the reception office.

"What was with that guy!"

Lit was outraged. In actual fact, halfway through I had to hold onto her when she started spilling out murderous intent.

If I didn't restrain her and if I didn't say beforehand that I would do the negotiation, Lit might have resorted to getting the approval by means of intimidation.

She was originally a Princess so she's the type that is bad at restraining herself in negotiations.

"But that sure was a weak performance. There's no way to solve the negotiation like that."

We'll have to start by investigating the reason why he rejected us. Of course, it won't take much time to investigate but... I quit adventuring for reasons like this so it was seriously bothersome.

“Then let’s try asking the higher official.”

“Higher official... well, there’s that option.”

I have Lit here. In this situation, we’ll be using her title of being the number one adventurer in Zoltan.



“Wow, so the Hero Lit-san has moved house.”

The chief of the department that handled the law and regulations regarding commerce and industry relations was a man approaching elderly age with gray hair.

He showed a friendly grin and seemed happy that Lit came to visit.

“Actually, I am currently partnering with Red here for a venture and I have something I’d like to ask.”

“Hou, Lit-san who always runs solo has actually formed a duo? That’s something to look forward to. Red... san right? It is an honor to get to know you.”

There wasn’t a need to reveal my D-rank Adventurer identity there. I gave a vague smile and shook the hand that was extended towards me.

“So, today we went to obtain permission for the sale of a new analgesic drug but we got rejected by the person in charge.”

“Ah~ I see.”

The chief nodded apologetically.

“I’m terribly sorry for that, you brought it up at a bad timing.”

“So something happened after all.”

“As expected of Lit-san that you noticed something. As you surmised, an issue occurred but this information isn’t something I wish will spread so please don’t reveal it to others.”

“Of course.”

The chief continued after seeing Lit and I nod.

“A drug he gave approval for a month ago actually could serve as a narcotic drug just by altering the dosage a little and that information spread through the back channels to reach people from the aristocracy until the lower ranks of society.”

“A drug approved a month ago?”

I tilted my head.

Even though I prepared my medicine myself, I would have heard about a new medicine from Doctor Newman or the other doctors.

“It sounds like Red-san is knowledgeable in terms of medicine? However, it is natural that you were unaware of it. The new drug was prepared in large quantities outside of town, transported into town the moment approval was given and was immediately sold to clients who signed contracts in advance. In other words, it was planned to be sold as a narcotic drug from the beginning.”

“I don’t get it, selling it that way would let them earn huge profits in the beginning but it would obviously be regulated immediately. They can’t hope for long-term income with that method.”

“It is indeed baffling. Perhaps it was the shallow thinking of an amateur apothecary. Nevertheless, on our side, it was extremely troublesome that it affected our prestige so the person-in-charge, Dan, was reprimanded and flooded with instructions to deal with it day and night.”

I see. I was displeased with that fat person-in-charge just now but now I pitied him a little.

It was most likely a terrible experience. I’ll gift him some stomach medicine the next

time I see him.

“Leaving that aside, this time it is a request from Lit-san after all. I’m sure there won’t be any issues, show me the documents and I’ll give the approval instead.”

“Really!? Thank you very much!”

We unexpectedly got approval easily.

Lit’s influence was huge after all.

...Even though I was aware of it, it still felt a little depressing. Despite taking charge in negotiations during the journey, now I was made painfully aware that it won’t go so smoothly without the title of being the Hero’s companion.

After that, I showed him the documents regarding the medicine and he issued the permit to us after confirming that there weren’t any problems.

I could now legally sell my medicine without any issues.



Leaving the parliament, I walked with my shoulders slightly slumped.

“Sorry, I ended up relying on you instead.”

I ended up relying on Lit even though I said that I would handle the negotiations. I felt a little disappointed with myself.

Lit who was walking ahead of me turned around and shook her head.

“Hey, Red. I’ve been eating the meals you made but do you hate making them? Do you cook for me because you want me to thank you?”

“...No that’s not it.”

“It’s the same for me, Red. I am happy that I can help you. There is totally no need to apologize. Even in the future, I will continue to aid you as much as I can and I will do

anything for you.”

I inadvertently stopped walking because of her straightforward show of affection.

Lit also stopped and we faced each other.

Asking her why she would go that far would be pretty insensitive.

“Thank you, Lit. Well, how do I put it, I’ll be in your care from today onward.”

“Yup!”

The happy smile on Lit’s face caused a smile to form on my face as well.

Chapter 15

Albert came over

After returning to the shop, I started preparing the medicine to deliver to Doctor Newman the next day and I asked Lit to look after the shop.

Apart from the occasional “Eh, Lit-san?” accompanied by a shocked voice, nothing happened in particular.

“It’s just a matter of time before rumors start spreading.”

Zoltan’s strongest Adventurer quit and became a shop assistant for an apothecary.

That information would definitely kick up a storm once it spreads. I would be lying if I claimed that I didn’t think that would be bothersome when Lit first came to the shop... but I no longer felt that way now.

“Nonetheless, what should I do?”

Maybe I should talk to the other B-rank Adventurer Albert. After all, in his case, he’s risen from the number two adventurer in Zoltan to the number one adventurer. But I’ve only spoken to him once before so we’re not actually acquaintances.

More importantly, adventurers don’t enjoy any welfare benefits at all; they don’t get any retirement fund or pension once they retire after all so there isn’t such an obligation to not retire right? Wasn’t adventuring a job with freedom where one can become an adventurer whenever they want to and quit whenever they please?

“That’s right, whether it becomes an uproar or not has nothing to do with me.”

After thinking hard about it, I convinced myself with that half-baked conclusion and concentrated on my remaining work while putting off the problem to a later date.



The day was coming to an end and the evening sun was about to sink below the horizon.

The work in this town ends slightly before sunset and it was commonplace to return home during sunset. Because of that, the shops that can expect customers from the returning crowd would stay open until slightly after sunset whereas the shops in the entertainment district would operate from evening until late at night when the customers who ended work would hang out there.

My Red & Lit Apothecary would operate until sunset so there was about another hour before we closed shop.

At the moment, Lit and I were seated at the counter having idle conversations while we waited for customers to arrive.

“Ah, that’s right, I want to drink mead.”

“What’s with the sudden craving?”

“Nah, there isn’t any particular reason, I just suddenly wanted to drink it.”

Mead, like the name implies, is an alcohol made using bees honey. (*TLN: It is literally read as Bees Honey Wine in Japanese*). Although it is not a fine liquor, drinking it on a regular basis will be slightly costly. Specifically, wine popular with the common folk cost 0.25 Peril, a silver coin called a Quarter Peril, per bottle; whereas a bottle of mead cost 2 Peril, eight times that of wine.

Incidentally, a cup of coffee cost 0.01 Peril: one common copper coin. You could buy a cup of Whisky for 0.1 Peril: ten common copper coins.

In comparison, the ally of the common folk, a 4-liter pot of ale or cider cost 0.5 Peril: 50 common copper coins: two Quarter Peril silver coins.

The alcohol I had at home was only a pot of cider as well as a leather bag filled with a strong liquor made from tree sap that I received as treatment fee when I treated an injured monster called a Zugu a long time back in the mountains.

“I was wondering if I could go buy some.”

“Yeah, I guess you should go before the shop closes.”

“Thanks! Please prepare a meal that will go well with mead.”

“All right, then today’s menu would be bread and somewhat strong flavor dishes. We can drink it after our meal as a dessert with apples to go with it too. There should be enough ingredients from what we purchased yesterday.”

The moment I nodded, Lit flew out of the shop like a gust of wind and that was not metaphorical as it was due to her superhuman physical abilities granted by her Divine Protection.

“But... what’s with her sudden craving for mead?”

And with that much vigor too.

I noticed that I had zoned out for some time thinking about it when the door to the shop opened accompanied by the ring of the chime.

“Welcom..... e.”

I unconsciously blinked to check that I didn’t see wrongly.

“Your shop is quite small.”

“Thanks.”

The current strongest adventurer in this town, the B-rank Adventurer Albert, was standing there with his usual pompous attitude.

“Well, what kind of medicine are you looking for?”

Even though I decided not to go looking for him, he came over instead.

“Nope, I didn’t come to purchase medicine.”

”.....”

What the heck, this stinks of trouble. To be honest, I wanted to tell him to go home if he wasn’t a customer. Nevertheless, treating Albert, who has some influence in this town, albeit small, with disdain would affect my future business.

That was why I decided to remain silent for the moment.

”.....”

”.....”

Despite saying that he wasn’t buying, he was looking all around the shop. I had no clue what his intentions were.

“Are you satisfied with a shop like this?”

I see, is he here to pick a fight?

“I’m satisfied.”

But he was not buying anything. I gave a half-hearted reply.

“My own shop, customers who would purchase things that I make, it adds color to my life while still providing me with sufficient income, a cute housemate...”

“Housemate?”

Ah, that was a slight slip of the tongue.

“Cough, well, at any rate, I am satisfied with this shop. I don’t know why you came here but I won’t be able to fulfill your expectations so it will be a waste of your time.”

“Those who are unaware of the circumstances of heaven sure do live happily.”

He laughed cynically but I lived the life of an aristocrat as the Knight Vice Captain so that didn’t faze me at all.

I placed my chin on my hand and blatantly replied with an annoyed expression.

“...Sigh never mind. Hey D-rank.”

“What, you still have something to say?”

“I’ll get to the point, were you the one who killed the Owlbear?”

“What are you talking about? You were the one who went to subjugate the Owlbear.”

I see, so he noticed that I was the one who defeated the Owlbear. Even though rotten, he is still a B-rank after all, seeing how he still noticed despite the numerous wounds from that fire.

“The deathblow to the Owlbear was not made by my sword. It was made by a blade with a much duller edge, for example... a sword like the copper sword you hold.”

“Oi oi, I’m a D-rank Adventurer. There’s no way I can cut down an Owlbear.”

While I was in the midst of saying that, a wave of killing intent surged from Albert’s body.

Hey now seriously? He was planning to attack to test me.

I immediately understood Albert’s intention but I didn’t know if he would stop just before striking me or if he would cut with the intent to kill.

“I will ask one more time, Red, did u kill the Owlbear?”

“I already told you it wasn’t me.”

Albert kicked off the floor.

At the same time, the long sword he drew from his hip swung down towards my shoulder.

The edge stopped just before my neck.

“Wha!?”

I fell on my backside after pausing for a moment.

Albert hid his disappointment and looked down at me.

“I wanted to invite you to be my companion but I was mistaken huh.”

Seriously, acting weak wasn’t easy at all.

At that time, a gust of wind blew in.

“Ah.”

A shockwave blew out from Albert’s back. That was probably the best way to describe it.

Lit’s twin swords attacked Albert from behind.

Albert was not bad either as he was able to react to it.

However, as he received it with an unstable posture, Albert’s sword made an abrupt snapping sound as it was bisected by Lit’s sword.

Nevertheless, that probably canceled out the slicing momentum as Albert was able to dodge Lit’s sword before it struck him. Unexpectedly, he did so by falling onto his backside like I just did moments ago.

However, that was the end. He won’t be able to continue with a second attack from

that posture. His sword was already broken too even if he wanted to retaliate.

“Lit, wait!”

I quickly stopped her. Lit’s sword stopped perfectly.

Her eyes were fraught with murderous intent bent on killing her opponent with her sword tip pointed in between his eyebrows before Lit finally took a step back.

“Li, Lit!? Why are you here!?”

“Albert, what are you doing to my important person? I will kill you depending on your answer.”

“Ah, gu...”

She unleashed the serious bloodthirst of a Swordswoman who had clashed with the Demon Lord’s Army. Albert trembled with his mouth opening and closing soundlessly.

“He came to invite me to be his companion. That just now seemed to have been a test.”

After I said that, Lit cast a sharp glare at Albert.

I shrug my shoulders and shook my hand to say that it was fine.

Lit reluctantly sheathed her sword.

“Fu~”

As the observer, I ended up being the person who was more nervous.

Albert tottered to his feet, turned back to look at the counter where I was before and then turned once more to look at the entrance where I now stood.

“Why are you there... since when?”

“I didn’t want to become Lit’s collateral.”

Albert tilted his head.

“Oi, hurry up and leave.”

“Hiii!?”

He was intimidated by Lit and left the shop in a hurry.

“Red! Are you all right!? Are you injured?”

“There’s no way I would be.”

“I’m glad, what did he intend to do, drawing his sword at Red like that!? Wouldn’t it be better if I just cut him down? It’s valid self-defense after all.”

“Of course you can’t just kill the only B-rank Adventurer in Zoltan. All things considered, Zoltan still needs him.”

“I wonder if that’s really the case.”

Lit retracted her killing intent as we spoke and the atmosphere returned to the way it was before.

“In the first place, that was so you Red. To do something so dangerous. It would have been better if you just retaliated!”

“I’m fine I’m fine, I believed that he would probably stop.”

“What would you do if he didn’t act within your expectations?”

“I’ll retaliate when that time comes.”

“How would you retaliate during the distance between the edge touching your neck or not... don’t tell me you’re actually able to do it?”

“Well now, I wonder about that.”

More importantly.

“Leaving that aside, Lit, wouldn’t it have been better if you didn’t toss aside the mead you went through the trouble to buy?”

I raised the bag I caught that was filled with mead.

Lit’s face reddened.

“So, sorry, I just unconsciously.”

“Don’t worry about it, thanks. In any case, I’m happy that you got that angry for my sake.”

I dashed out from the counter for the sake of catching the mead Lit tossed aside. Even though I went through the trouble to hide my real ability from Albert, I wondered why did I show a glimmer of my strength for the sake of that bag of mead but... I guess I didn’t want the alcohol that Lit wanted to drink to be wasted just for my sake.

“Oh well, it’s a little early but why don’t we close the shop? Let’s eat after we finish tallying the sales. You went through the trouble to buy this so let’s slowly drink this together tonight.”

“...Yup!”

I had a premonition that this would turn into a troublesome issue but I’ll enjoy the moment now.

Otherwise, I would lose out when it actually becomes a troublesome matter.



As for the reason for the mead... I asked Lit a long time after that and found out that in her hometown, newlyweds usually stopped work for a month and enjoyed their honeymoon while drinking mead.

Lit confided to me that... she suddenly thought of it and wanted to drink mead with

me no matter what.

As expected, after hearing that, the both of us ended up blushing.

Chapter 16

The ring is in the amber

Rumors quickly spread.

The next day, when I tried to exit to open the shop, I saw a mass of people lined up in front of the shop consisting of Adventurers Guild executives, merchants, craftsmen from various guilds, bureaucrats and even aristocrats.

“Ah —, are all of you here to request for medicine... or I suppose not.”

The clothes they wore were made of high-quality dyed fabrics with gorgeous embroideries. A conservative estimate would likely still not fall below 50 Peryl.

They all looked at one another. And as the representative, an Adventurers Guild executive who was almost 2 meters in height approached me.

“Red-kun, I wish to ask one thing. In your home, is Lit... is Zoltan’s hero, the Adventurer Lit, really living there?”

“It’s true. I live together with Lit and she helps out with the shop.”

The central pillars of Zoltan were astir.

“I wish to speak to Lit.”

“I do not mind but we are currently preparing to open shop so please speak to Lit after she is done confirming the stock.”

“Wha, you bastard! Do you intend to make us wait!?”

Somebody shouted.

“Lit is my staff. She is currently performing a critical task. It would be a different issue if we are talking about life and death matters but I believe your topics will not be affected by waiting for about 30 minutes.”

“Are you sure you can make that decision on your own? Don’t you think you should first consult Lit and ask if she really wants to make us wait?”

“It’s because I understand Lit very well.”

“...That’s some confidence you have there Red-kun. I never knew you had that side to you.”

“I am surprised to hear that you are aware of a D-rank adventurer.”

“I remember the faces and history of all adventurers who are enrolled in the guild.”

The executive said without a change in his expression. His gaze was cold and a regular adventurer would probably be trembling from that look of despire.

I could imagine that he was a skilled adventurer when he was still active.

Well, as a companion of the arena wrecking Danan with his eye expressions that could kill, that gaze was not a big deal to me.

After glaring at me for about a minute, the Adventurers Guild executive showed an impressed expression.

“...All right, I’ll wait for a while.”

“Thank you for your consideration.”

I could still hear complaints but I acted like the conversation was over and went back into the shop.

After about 20 minutes, Lit came out from the storage holding a basket with the medicine meant to restock the shop.

It was sad to see that there was not much to restock as a single basket was sufficient.

“Thanks for the hard work, I’ll line them up for display.”

“It’s all right, I’ll do it to the end. The top brass are here right? Just let them wait.”

Lit stuck her tongue out.

I gave a wry grin and counted the change we had at the counter.

I confirmed the number of common bronze coins, quarter Peryl silver coins, and Peryl silver coins.

“Great, I’m done. Now then, I’ll quickly reject them and come back. I work for this shop after all.”

“Yeah, I’ll be troubled if Lit isn’t around so finish up quickly.”

Lit turned to look at me and showed a wide smile.

In exchange for Lit who left towards the people waiting outside, a skinny small man entered the shop.

It was a face I saw outside just now.

“Thieves Guild if I’m not wrong.”

“You sure are knowledgeable despite being D-rank.”

The skinny small man might seem insignificant at a glance. However, packed within that body was the experience of slipping away from numerous fighting scenes and his eyes that always gazed steadily at a person’s hands and feet instead of a person’s eyes was the trademark of a fierce and excellent coward who has constantly experienced being in risk of betrayal.

The Thieves Guild was an association that presides over the underworld. In other places, they were called mafia or gangs while in the East they were called yakuza.

It may be a criminal organization but their front was that of a legal organization meant

to prevent pick-pocketing and robbery criminal organizations from getting out of hand and have brazenly established power in a corner of the political center.

Well, whether it was a necessary evil or a mere evil was not something I had to be concerned with.

The Thieves Guild makes quite a number of requests to the Adventurers Guild. They probably have sent requests for Lit to resolve when problems occurred.

Or perhaps they have been sending requests to Albert all this time but since Lit wasn't around any longer, they were concerned if Albert will have to accept other requests. It was well-known that Albert was intimate with the Thieves Guild Leader Gorga.

That was probably what I had to take into account at that moment.

"The others seem to wish to persuade Lit but she is a hero. She can obtain whatever she wants. Neither I nor them can prepare compensation that can change a hero's will. That's why it is a waste to speak to Lit."

She can obtain whatever she wants huh... this man seems to know something about Lit.

"And so you came to me?"

The Thieves Guild man grinned with the corner of his mouth raised as he took out a chest with a key from his chest pocket and opened it in front of me.

Within it was a single Elven coin made from unstained Elven platinum sitting on top of red silk.

Elven coin was the highest form of currency on this continent, equivalent to 10,000 Peryl.

Those rare coins were made using Elven platinum (Elf White Gold) and were currency made during the Elf Age, the refining method has now been lost. In other words, it was impossible to counterfeit it and impossible to create in the mint of any single country.

Tougher than steel and resistant to heat, acid, and corrosion. More importantly, if you hold this coin in your hand and utilize your Divine Protection, in exchange for the coin turning into lead with no value, it will bestow the power to raise the level of your skill belonging to your Divine Protection by one for the short duration of a minute.

It was something that the general public and even merchants don't use in transactions.

It was only used in transactions between countries so maybe it should be categorized as a treasure instead of a coin.

When I was traveling with Ruti and the others, we usually used it as a doping tool when fighting against strong foes... of course, that applied to the companions apart from myself but as I could only use common skills, it would not make a huge difference to raise them by just a single level.

Well, that is to say, even though it was something I had not seen for a while, it was not something precious to me at present. I could find quite a few if I delve into the depths of ancient Elf ruins. Although there are not that many adventurer parties that are capable of that.

However, even if he was an executive from the Thieves Guild, he would never imagine that I was familiar with the Elven coin. The man took my expression as an expression of surprise and continued talking proudly.

"It's natural that you would feel shocked. This is a miraculous item that ordinary people will never set their eyes upon in their lifetime. This is an Elven coin. I believe you have at least heard the name."

"Yeah, I know about it."

"Then the conversation will be quicker. Will you cut ties with Lit for this? With this money, you can stop working in this small shop and enjoy a life of comfort with servants. What say you? As for Lit, it would be for the good of the world that she continues working as an adventurer and it would be better for her too. You would be happy, Lit would be happy, and we would be happy too. Everyone would be happy. If you want women, I can prepare those for you. I'm talking about beauties that would make a shiver run up your spine just by her touch. Can you imagine it? She's a 50 Peryl silver coins a night girl. Not those semicircle quarter Peryl mind you, 50 of those round Peryl silver coins.

This man was probably a barker for the red-light district when he had a lower rank in the past. He was a master at talking continuously in a clear voice.

However,

“Cheap.”

“Ha?”

“Lit is priceless. I would not do it even if you offered me a thousand Elven coins.”

“Wha, you...”

“Moreover.”

I lowered my voice so that Lit would not pick it up with her extraordinary hearing.

“Compared to a 50 Peryl a night woman, Lit is infinitely better.”

He probably won’t be able to find any way to retort my words.

The Thieves Guild man clicked his tongue lightly and locked the small chest before keeping it in his chest pocket.

“To not be moved a slight bit by 10,000 Peryl, you are either a big deal or an idiot.”

“I am certain that the Thieves Guild can offer me 10,000 Peryl because the value of this is beyond that, right?”

The man frowned.

“That’s right. Seriously, as expected of the man Lit chosen, you have guts despite being D-rank... well, contact us whenever you have a change of heart. We accept price negotiations.”

“I don’t need it so give it up.”

Nevertheless, the man still placed his business card with his name written on it on the counter and left the shop.



The turmoil outside would not settle despite Lit's firm rejection as the other party was not willing to give up.

"Is this because of an issue in the remunerations!?"

"No!"

"We will treat you better than before."

"I don't need it."

"We'll prepare a special rank."

"I absolutely refuse."

"If you want a man, I can offer my son."

""What are you talking about.""

The last person was retorted even by his surroundings so he dejectedly fell back.

"Ah sheesh, for god's sake!"

Lit finally could not take it anymore and shouted.

"I have made a lifetime employment contract with Gi... Red! I retire from adventuring! If you harass Red or try to banish Red from this town, I will leave with him!"

What's with lifetime employment contract. Well, it seemed like there were those who insinuated that they would obstruct my shop. It looked like that ticked Lit off.

After listening to Lit's outburst, they finally confirmed their doubts and got to know

me so the Zoltan big shots gave up and left.

The indignant Lit came back and showed an awkward look when she saw me.

“You heard what I said outside?”

“You shouted that loudly after all.”

“...Are you angry? They were too persistent and said strange things so I inadvertently.”

I beckoned Lit over.

Lit came close while looking slightly uneasy.

I gently raised my right hand.

“Give me your hand.”

“?”

Lit stretched her hand out like she was told and I wrapped both my hands around hers and grasped it.

“Hey, Red?”

“It’s a present.”

I slid what I wanted to give her for her first payday into her palm.

“Eh...”

“It might be a cheap item to Lit but this is the down payment for the lifetime employment contract. Of course, the down payment will be appropriated at the market price upon payment of the remaining payment.”

“Wa! An amber bracelet!”

On Lit's palm was a bracelet with a single amber featured on a leather band. Even if I was being modest, this was not something that adventurers would consider expensive but...

"This..."

Lit stared at the amber.

An amber was a jewel made from fossilized sap. As it was originally liquid sap, there might be tree bark or flowers contained within when it underwent fossilization.

The amber I gave Lit had leaves shaped like a ring contained within.

"Down payment huh..."

Lit smiled and jokingly placed the amber on her left-hand ring finger.

"I might actually misunderstand if you give me something like this."

Perhaps she was embarrassed with what she said as Lit concealed her mouth with her bandana.

"Misunderstand? Then there is something I would like to buy while you are having that misunderstanding... please let me know what kind of gem do you like."

Ah, shit, don't get that red. I would become embarrassed too.

"...Nothing in particular, I would love anything Red chooses."

The troublesome thing is that Divine Protection doesn't give romance skills.

As veteran swordsmen, we exchanged clumsy and innocent words... but nevertheless, I held this time dear to me.

Chapter 17

Let's go deliver medicine

We should separate the time for flirting and the time for work. It is important to have a balance.

If not, we would end up in the situation where Gonz and Tanta, who came running over after hearing the rumors about me and Lit, were squirmy from seeing us hold hands in front of them.

...Just kill me.

"Ah, we came at a bad time. Sorry!"

Said Gonz but he was grinning to himself and didn't seem to be sorry at all.

"Red-oniichan, you should have told me from the start! If the house was for newlyweds, I would have given more thought to the layout!"

While on the other hand, Tanta was complaining about his architectural inspiration.

And Lit covered not only her mouth but her whole face with her bandana. I guess this was embarrassing for her too.

"Leaving that aside, the boring herb collector and the Hero Lit huh."

"Don't call me boring. I actually plan for the future when I go harvest herbs."

"Sure sure."

Gonz took just a moment to alter his downtown silly grin on his elven origin handsome face,

“As expected of the Hero Lit. You have great eyes for choosing Red, he is a prime article in downtown.”

And said with a serious tone. Tanta also nodded with his arms folded.

This time it was my turn to turn red in embarrassment.



It seemed like Gonz didn't have any work today.

When asked why he didn't have work in the middle of the week, he said that his business type was to rest a day in three days during summer. The ones making requests also laze around during summer so he could get by with this pace.

That is why Gonz and Tanta infiltrated my store, surveyed the customers who occasionally came in, tried to find fault with my work and went out of their way to report to Lit about how I lived my life in Zoltan.

I was working just beside them so I was wishing that they would stop.

“When I was sick, Red-oniichan went into the mountains where there was an Owlbear to harvest medicine for me.”

“Ooh ooh, and so what happened!”

I was quite embarrassed when tales of my heroism was showcased in banquets when I was in the Knight Order but this was embarrassing too.

“Ri-right, Gonz.”

“What's it?”

“Why did you come to me that time? Of course, you knew me but you should have only known me as a D-rank adventurer who only harvests herbs.”

“Ah, Doctor Newman recommended your name that time. I also knew your personality

and understood that you were trustworthy so I made the request. Ah, you really saved us that time.”

“Doctor Newman did?”

It was Doctor Newman who diagnosed Tanta. That incident was the trigger that made him recognize my skill and he helped me to wholesale my medicine but did he know me before that?

“I recall he said something about the supply of medicine stabilizing after Red came. He found it strange and got to know your name when he went to ask around the Adventurers Guild.”

“A trained eye will notice things huh?”

Gonz and Lit nodded in harmony.

Ho~ I see.

“Oh, speaking of Doctor Newman, it’s about time for the medicine delivery.”

“Shall I go?”

“Hn, I haven’t introduced you to Doctor Newman so we’ll go together another day. There’s somehow quite a number of customers today so I’ll leave the shop to you.”

“Okay.”

I had taught Lit plenty regarding medicine. She had first aid knowledge and technique from when she was an adventurer so she quickly picked it up. She would probably be fine taking care of the shop alone.

I hoisted the medicine box I prepared yesterday on my back and headed towards Newman’s clinic.



Newman's clinic was located at a corner of downtown.

It was tough to call it clean as the original white wall building had turned dirty gray. It was a compact building and has been a clinic even since Newman purchased it.

With one examination room, one reception, one waiting room, and one store, it was smaller compared to regular hospitals. As Newman didn't even have an office, documents had to be split and stored in the store and examinations room.

The price was cheap because of that so the clinic was popular among the people who lived in the neighborhood.

"Oh, Red-kun, thanks for coming."

Newman was in the midst of examining a thin child with a cold who had a towel wrapped around his head.

"Please wait in the waiting room. I will come over after I am done."

"Sure sure."

The receptionist was a girl about halfway past 10 years old and although she didn't seem that serious, she conversed with me brightly. I sat on the chair in the waiting room and looked around.

There was only an old woman who was dozing off seated there. She was probably the grandmother of the child being examined now.

Perhaps used to kill time, there was a wooden board game called Wyvern's Race placed there.

Even though it would not likely be stolen as it cost only five common coins, I was still worried but from the worn out look it had, it seemed like a lot of people have come by to entertain themselves with it for a long time.

There was a window in the waiting room.

As glass was an expensive commodity, the window was hollow and it would be closed using a wooden cover at night.

There was a single copper wind chime dangling from the window and it would chime whenever the wind blew in.

Wind chimes were a practice that came with the battle with the Demon Lord Army but people mostly use it around this parts without minding the origin.

After a while, the kid with red forehead... he was probably having a fever... and Newman came to the waiting room.

“I will be prescribing some medications. If you run out of the medicine, you can head over to the Apothecary run by Red-kun over here. He will be able to give you the appropriate medicine if you show him this prescription.”

He said as he told them the way to my shop.

“Oya, Red-chan, you finally opened your shop, that’s great.”

“Thank you, grandma can drop by any time if you need any medicine.”

“Well, I’ll come by to buy some medicine for back pain if you have any.”

I used to greet this grandma when I used to live in the tenement house but she apparently remembered my name. Conversely, I could not recall her name at all... isn’t that bad as a businessman?

The grandma and the child placed a couple copper coins on the reception and thanked Newman before they left.

I glanced at the reception table. There were eight copper coins placed on the counter.

“That’s pretty cheap, eight commons.”

“I received two bags of sausages in exchange.”

A barter system huh?

Perhaps that grandma's place was a butcher.

"Sorry for the wait, I'll confirm the medicine now."

"Sure thing."

I picked up the medicine box beside me and stood up but,

"It's fine here. This room has the most space after all."

Newman said with a bitter smile and stopped me.

Well, Newman said it himself so I placed the medicine box on the floor and opened it and handed him the order sheet.

Newman read the order sheet and meticulously took the medicine out from my medicine box to check that they were present.

"They tally with the order sheet. By the way, is it really impossible to get Bloodneedles?"

"It would be tough this year."

"No huh? All right."

"Summer would end in about another month so the diseases that require medicine made using Bloodneedle would circulate again right?"

"The same like last year. But it would be problematic without it. Knowing that the peddlers can't prepare the numbers we need, I can only lament my inability to do anything."

After we continued that topic for a little while, we heard a scream from outside and the sound of a person falling down accompanied by a plate or something shattering.

"What was that?"

Newman and I went out to check.

Similarly, the people from the houses and shops along the road noisily came out to see.

“The sound came from that house.”

“That seems to be the case.”

Newman nodded to my words. I placed my hand on the handle of the sword on my waist and moved towards the house where the sound came from.

Newman followed behind me and told me after he had a sudden realization.

“Right, the person living in that house is a middle-aged man called Jackson.”

“Do you know him?”

“I have treated him countless time from drinking too much alcohol. He has been binge drinking ever since his wife ran away last year.”

That’s scary. I’ll have to beware too.

“Did he fall down in his drunken state?”

“It would be best if that was the case.”

I knocked on the door.

“Hey, Jackson-san. Are you all right?”

I strained my ears after asking. There was no reply... but.

“I hear moaning, sorry but I’ll be coming in!”

I tried to open the door but was met with a metallic sound. It was locked.

I drew my sword and pierced the lock on the door without hesitation and destroyed it.

“Ooh, was that the skill of a D-rank adventurer?”

“It’s easy if the opponent isn’t moving.”

I deceived him as I opened the door and stepped into the house.

Chapter 18

Poison and Medicine

“Bedroom?”

I ran down the hallway and opened the door to the bedroom.

There I saw a middle-aged man with pale complexion and bloodshot eyes collapsed on the floor groaning while holding his chest.

“Jackson!”

Newman immediately sat down beside him and checked his symptoms.

“Respiratory failure, sweating, fever, pain as well? He’s in bad shape, Red, please bring your medicine box over.”

“Understood.”

I quickly ran to the clinic, violently repacked the medicine that was taken out of the medicine box and once again ran back to Newman.

When I returned, Newman had cut open the patient’s shirt with his knife and was palpating his heartbeat.

“His heart is acting strangely too.”

Newman immediately secured his airway to aid his breathing and administered first aid.

However, as he didn’t know the cause of it, he was unable to respond to it.

“Here.”

I passed him the powdered medicine made from gray starfish grass I had inside my medicine box. It was a kind of antidote that would absorb poison inside the blood vessel and would be dispelled in a detoxified state.

“You can tell?”

“Just to alleviate the symptoms. I have reached mastery for my First Aid skill.”

First Aid was a common skill that was pretty much backward compatible with the Treatment skill that was a unique skill held by Doctors.

As the effects were not cumulative, it was common for soldiers and adventurers to have some form of the skill. Even though it was not a skill that people who aspire to treat others will look for... the benefit of reaching mastery for this First Aid skill was [Provisional Divine Doctor]. Just that skill alone had a comparable effect to the highest level Treatment skill.

It could show the ways to relieve symptoms even without knowing the root cause of the illness.

In other words, instead of treating, it would relieve the pain or stop the bleeding, improve the condition from a critical one and create time until the patient can be properly treated using magic or surgery.

Newman showed a confused expression for an instant but he immediately regained his serious look and nodded before taking the medicine from me.



While Newman was performing his treatment, I searched the surroundings to investigate the root cause of his illness.

“Hn, this...”

I immediately noticed a square piece of paper on the floor.

When I touched it, I could tell there was a small amount of powder left on its surface.

“Medicine huh?”

Those with Herbalist or Alchemist Divine Protection would be capable of identifying the medicine by just licking it a little but I didn’t have such an ability.

“Doctor Newman, I found this.”

I showed him the paper.

“This... I see! Red-kun, please help me bring him to the clinic!”

“It’s all right to move him? Okay!”

As we didn’t have a stretcher, I held his head while Newman grabbed his feet and we carried him to the clinic.

The curious onlookers outside took the initiative to open a path when they saw us.

“Make way make way!”

While being led by the assertive voices of downtown folks, we returned to the clinic.



After a while, Jackson vomited a large amount and somewhat stabilized. He still looked to be in pain but he was breathing normally.

During that time, Newman, with a scrunched up face, picked up the bucket filled with vomit and carried it to the examination room.

The receptionist girl hastily helped Newman with an anxious look.

“We can’t let our guard down but he has escaped from the dangerous phase.”

Newman exhaled a long breath.

“What was the cause?”

“This has been circulating lately.”

Newman showed me the paper I picked up when I tilted my head in doubt.

“It’s an analgesic. It is actually a medicine that was approved just recently... the authorities quickly clamped down on it but it seems like a considerable amount was able to slip through.”

I recalled the commotion when I went to obtain permission for my analgesic medicine.

“In other words, he had drug intoxication?”

“The other doctors are still researching on the detailed symptoms and measures. But the gray starfish being effective was something we missed out. Do you mind if I shared this with the other clinics?”

I naturally wouldn’t mind but how should I deal with it being discovered by me. It would be unnatural if I tried to credit this to Newman either.

I don’t believe my true identity would be revealed with just this but... I guess I could go with the theory that I have a Divine Protection that gives me intermediate compounding and I could see symptoms using First Aid?

“I don’t mind.”

I replied briefly.



Although Jackson had yet to regain consciousness, I still had my shop to take care of so I had to return.

“I’m grateful that Red-kun was here.”

Newman lowered his head and thanked me when I was about to leave.

“Regarding that analgesic drug, it is no longer just about addiction so I believe a lot more patients would be carried to the clinic. I hope that Red-kun prepares more medicine too.”

“All right, I have gray starfish grass growing in my garden so I have stock. Let me know whenever you’re running out.”

“Thank you.”

Analgesic drug huh? I wonder who was the person who brought it in.

Even though I said that, I didn’t have any intention of tracking down the person and stopping him.



“That took you long!”

When I returned to the shop, Lit complained with a sour look.

“I’m hungry — ”

Now that I think about it, it was already way past noon.

It seemed like Gonz and Tanta went home to have lunch.

“Sorry sorry, there was some trouble.”

“Trouble? Are you sure you weren’t slacking off?”

“When I went to Doctor Newman’s place, you remember that analgesic drug we heard about when we went to get permission for my new medicine, somebody nearby had drug intoxication. I helped to administer First Aid.”

“I see, so there are already addicts with drug intoxication. That drug is dangerous.”

“I’m not too sure about that, sometimes it might be because of certain people’s constitution. Cases like that might increase in the future so please help me prepare the medicine.”

I said as I headed to the washroom to wash my hands. Naturally, that was so that I could prepare to cook.

“I’ll be going to the market before evening so please look after the shop again later.”

“All right, also, I want omelet for lunch.”

“I think I still have some tomato sauce left. I’ll be able to get it done quickly.”

“Yay!”

When I was journeying, I always had eggs inside my item box.

Eggs have good nutritional value and there are many cooking variations. It could be served as a main dish, as a side dish or with soup too.

It is an ingredient that the common people are able to buy normally but it would be expensive to buy it every day. But, I always have it ready.

It was up to preference to either take it out once the omelet was half-cooked or only after it as fully cooked.

Basically, I like it when the surface has been cooked to a crisp.

In addition, the ingredients to put inside... minced meat, nuts, onions and such are passed through the fire before added in. That was also a matter of preference but wrapping them in while the egg cooks would make it delicious.

I usually made it in that manner when I was alone but...

“I wonder how does Lit like it.”

Since there was another person who would be eating with me, I was a little troubled. Maybe I should ask about Lit’s preference.

I pondered for a short moment while holding the egg in my hand before I broke the egg without asking Lit.

I decided that I would let her try the omelet that I find the tastiest first.



I poured red tomato sauce on the crispy omelet before adding powdered basil to it.

The side dishes would be herb soup with white bread and two sausages.

After Lit had a bite, her lips split into a smile and she ate it all in one go.

Perhaps she was hungry as it was a late lunch but she moved the spoon with great momentum as she scooped the food into her mouth in an unladylike manner.

I suddenly noticed that I had unconsciously smiled too. I then started eating as well.

“Yup, it’s tasty.”

It was a lot tastier compared to when I tasted it as I was cooking. Maybe because there was a person in front of me who was eating it deliciously.

Chapter 19

Now's not the time to be adventuring

"I'll be going to the mountains for a bit tomorrow."

"For medicinal grass? We still have stock though."

"Because of the drug intoxication case, they need gray starfish grass for the medicine. We do have some stock available and we are growing them in the garden but I thought that I should increase the stock a little more."

"All right. Would you be camping out?"

"For a night. Gray starfish grass doesn't clump in a single location but grows in small batches under the shadows of fallen trees so it would take some time to gather them."

"Roger~ I'll take care of the shop so don't worry."

"If people come in for antidotes, pass them the medicine on the third shelf."

"The gray starfish grass powder right?"

"Also... ah~ let's close the Apothecary for a day after I return."

I suddenly remembered something.

"I haven't fulfilled my promise of helping to dry the clothes and whatnot in Lit's item box."

"Oh right there was that promise, it's all right, they have been in there all this while so there's no need to change it now."

"That won't do, it might grow mold if you don't dry it once in a while."

An item box was a magic bag that would store items in a separate dimension.

The capacity would differ according to price and Lit's item box could store up to 500 kilograms. Its price was at an expensive 7000 Peryl but to adventurers who have to

bring back all the treasure they find but can't carry, that was a classic magic item that all adventurers aimed to purchase.

Most adventurers throw everything they get their hands on into it... so they often forget what they place inside the item box.

Although the item placed within would be taken out with just a thought, the only other function is to take everything out so everyone has experienced placing something within and completely forgetting about it.

It was necessary to organize it on a regular basis... but Lit doesn't do it.

That's why I asked her to organize it at the same time she dries the clothes in the garden.

"I'll be helping out so properly organize it once. Once we're done, we can go have a swim in the river or have a barbecue by the dry river bed.

"Just the two of us!"

"Ri-right, the two of us."

"All right, then let's quickly get it over and done with."

It slightly tugged on my mind that we were taking a break and having a barbecue while the analgesic drug case was still ongoing but I was just the owner of an Apothecary. I was not responsible for the world nor for the town.

"Let's forget about work and relax and have fun."

Lit also had the same thought as she laughed and said that.



It had been a long time since I last been here and the mountain was once again in its lush summer attire.

“Just give up already, accept that it is fall now.”

While smiling bitterly at the cicada cries that could still be heard, I advanced while cutting a path through the overgrown grass and twigs with my copper sword.

Incidentally, a copper sword with a blunt edge was not a suitable choice for this use.

A proper adventurer would spend a little gold to buy a proper hatchet.

“Here it is.”

I harvested the gray starfish grass growing under the shadows of a fallen tree.

In order to harvest medicinal grass, one has to trek away for the mountain path or animal path into the heart of the mountain. It was quite a laborious task and one must constantly be on the lookout for small but deadly animals like the poison snake which might bite your feet.

Novice adventurers may look down upon medicinal herb harvesting but the Adventurers Guild was assessing whether they could endure this trial.

“Also, one might encounter monsters like this.”

The moss near my foot foamed and a tentacle covered in moss extended towards me.

I quickly retreated and evaded that slow attack.

“Giant Amoeba huh?”

Also called the lesser slime. Amoeba falsely resembles the slime race but many adventurers treat them as slimes due to their visual similarities. Unlike slimes, they are fragile monsters that can be damaged normally with a sword slash so they are known as an inferior slime and are called the disgraceful name of Lesser Slime.

I slashed down from above towards the slowly approaching Giant Amoeba and defeated it.

Naturally, there was no point hoping that something of this level could strengthen my Divine Protection.

There were various kinds of monsters and animal in the mountain.

Ones that immediately attacks, ones that stay hidden and wait for an opportunity and ones that escape for a moment and return after calling their companions. They all respond differently.

In the depths of the mountain, there was a breeding ground for Chimaeras, perhaps the product of the ancient Elf Age, stray Trolls that wandered over from the [Wall at the End of the World] and even giant humanoids called Gugs.

As people have not been here for a long time, there was an abundance of medicinal grass and wild plants but it was not an environment where novice adventurers could survive.

The environment tests all kinds of survival skills like collecting information on dangerous areas or how to read a map. The E-rank Adventurers could only accept requests in which the client was the Adventurers Guild precisely because the guild wanted to confirm if they possess such fundamental abilities.

There weren't any tests to become an Adventurer but in exchange, the first request could be said to be a test.

Nevertheless, Chimeras were no longer a threat to me.

Chimeras are an absurd monster with a lion body and a dragon and goat head stuck on its shoulders so they are able to attack with all three heads simultaneously and the dragon head is capable of releasing a breath attack so it is quite a troublesome foe.

However, in terms of monster popularity, it is a different matter. It is a popular monster for Adventurers who aim to become a dragon slayer by battling against a mock dragon while on the other hand, its goat head possesses friendliness to humans so its younglings can fetch up to 5000 Peryl to be sold as pets for successful Adventurers.

It was also a strange reality in the world how they are also a classic monster in zoos placed beside the likes of Gryphons.

I heard news of injuries every year due to it spewing breath attacks onto people

outside the cage so was it really okay to make it a classic monster there?

And the place I was headed to was that Chimera breeding ground.

That was the best place to harvest if I wish to obtain gray starfish grass quickly. The last time I surveyed the area, there were ancient elf buildings overgrown by vegetation, leaving lots of dark places that the gray starfish grass love to grow in.



After coming here countless times and driving away the Chimeras that attacked me, the Chimera seemed to have found me to be a troublesome opponent and have decided to leave me alone. Although not to the extent of a dragon, the Chimera possesses decent intelligence on par with human children. As Chimera even keep wolves and dogs as their watchdogs. However, the only method they know of to discipline them is through threats so their relationship rarely lasts for long.

That's why it would remember my face and scent and share that information with its herd such that they would not approach me.

During their last assault, about ten of them showed up and attacked me at the same time. I was shocked at that time and it was quite a tough fight as I incurred injuries in numerous places but after that incident, the Chimera would turn the opposite direction whenever they see me and never attack me again. Even to the extent that the Chimeras would chase away other Chimeras who try to approach me.

That is to say, the profound thoughts I was having at the moment was a kind of escape from reality. It was about time I gave up and recognize the situation I was in.

In front of me was a short girl who was probably a novice adventurer looking at me with glittering eyes. Perhaps she didn't gather information; or she underestimated the Chimeras; or she lost her way, for the time being, she was being attacked by Chimeras in the Chimera breeding ground and I couldn't leave her to her death so I approached, which was when the Chimeras hurriedly ran away, leading to the situation I was in now.

“Yo-your name please!”

“.....”

“So-sorry, without even introducing myself! I am Alice!”

The girl called Alice was holding a Scythe as a weapon unbefitting of her small stature. She seemed to have quite a personality despite being a novice.

Okay. Let’s run.

“Eh?”

I activated Lightning Feet and fled from the scene in an instant.

The being that helped her was a mountain spirit. If I was asked in town, I’ll go with that reply.

Raising a flag by encountering a novice adventurer in the mountains?

Don’t make me laugh, I am aiming for a slow life without any ‘adventure’. Especially an adventurer with such strange equipment.

Either way, that novice adventurer was probably saddled with all kinds of troublesome issues and I would be stuck with expending a lot of effort to resolve them.

[Ah-] A crow above my head laughed at me. I was suddenly curious about how that crow felt as it saw how the Chimeras fled from me while I, in turn, fled from a novice adventurer.



This was after quite some time but,

“That must have been the Tengu Demon described in the East. The demons in the East are not all evil and there apparently have been cases where they aided people who were lost in the mountains.”

“Tengu Demon-san...”

I heard that from the adventurers in town. That was unrelated to me. Definitely. Probably.



The next day, before returning from the mountain, I stopped by the area where Bloodneedle grew.

The area that was supposed to have been completely burned down has already been covered by greenery.

The Owlbear corpse had already been consumed by other animals and monsters so there were no traces left at all.

“Yup, it will return to normal next year.”

Or perhaps I might even be able to harvest more Bloodneedle compared to previous years. I felt such vast amounts of vitality from that area that made me think so.

It looks like medicinal herb harvesting will be hectic next year.



On the way home after descending from the mountain, I came across a single goblin wearing an expensive bridal gown singing while holding a kitchen knife.

I ignored it.

After moving further ahead, I saw a disturbance ahead with knights blockading the bridge.

I took a detour.

On the detour, there was a strange guy who shouted that he wanted me to collect his heritage he left in the magician’s mansion.

I refused and asked him to go to the Adventurers Guild.

“...I’ve been bumping into strange people excessively today.”

It would probably have been a heart-pounding moment for an adventurer seeking quests but I have plans for tomorrow.

I opened the door to my home.

I heard the pitter-patter of running footsteps.

“I’m home.”

“Welcome back!”

See, now’s not the time to be adventuring.

Chapter 20

Lit and Red

“Now, let’s organize your item box!”

“Oh —”

Lit replied with a dispirited look. Maybe because she was a princess, she wasn’t the type to do this kind of task herself.

“For starters, just take everything out.”

“Ye~s”

It would be a mess if she took them out indoor so I recommended we did it outside. It was also important that I ensured it was safe by making sure there wasn’t anybody around.

“Very good, there’s nobody around.”

It was my garden so naturally there wasn’t anybody but it was better to be safe.

Lit turned over her item box... and stiffened.

“What’s wrong?”

”.....”

Don’t tell me she forgot the Command Word to release it? If that was the case, the only way to take out the items inside that she had forgotten about would be to destroy the item box.

But that didn’t seem to be the case.

“Don’t laugh okay.”

“?”

I tilted my head in confusion.

Lit took a deep breath to calm herself before,

“Thunder Waker!”

Yup, she cried out the name of my once favorite sword.

“...You bought this item box for me after all.”

“That was because we were parting.”

That was more embarrassing than funny.

While both of us had red faces, the items from her item box rolled onto the garden one after the other.

I looked on in a daze for a while before,

“...Wait, that is a lot!”

Furthermore, quite a number of junk stood out among the items that came out. Well, they were not junk but they were stuff that B-rank adventurers usually ignored.

“Why did you keep regular swords and spears?”

“I kind of wanted to sell them.”

Well, of course, that would be a moderate income for an ordinary person but taking

into account the Frost Spear beside it that could sell for 4500 Peryl, a regular weapon that sells for 10 Peryl would just be an accounting error.

“Mu, I’ll go sell them tomorrow so let’s put the important items in the storeroom for now.”

It was normal for adventurers who purchase large capacity item boxes but it looked like she did have a bad habit of collecting items.

Adventurers are able to earn more compared to regular people not because of the remuneration from the request but by snatching the assets from the monsters or bandits they fought against. They also hoard treasures and magical items during their lifetime and it was the principal of adventurers to take the items of the subjugated for their own.

Even if the items were stolen from a neighboring village. Apart from when it was a request to recover the items, they were not obliged to return to items and the reward for recovery requests had to be a lot better.

Such treasures were included in the adventurer’s livelihood.

“...There’s a strong inclination for upper and lower undergarments.”

“Stop looking!”

It was a large quantity nonetheless.

There was probably also a large number of clothes that she bought which she forgot about.

Moreover, about half of them have clearly not been washed.

“Uu, u—”

That’s bad, Lit was red-faced with tears in her eyes. I didn’t think much of it as adventurers regularly organized their items but only now I understood that doing it after the person has quit adventuring was quite problematic.

“This much is common! Hey, hurry up and organize them and bring the clothes for washing to the washroom. I’ll organize the magic tools.”

Lit turned her back to me in protest againsts my forced follow-up.

Even though it was a tacit understanding during journeys that our appearances would be sloppy and we wouldn’t mind even if we changed in each other’s presence, slow life was seriously troublesome.

“...Then, I’ll tidy up Red’s laundry from tomorrow onward also.”

“Huh?”

“We’ll be even then.”

“I-is that how that works?”

Oh well, if she was placated with that then it was fine. Even though I didn’t really understand.

Lit seemed to be convinced after I nodded as she started to reluctantly tidy up the clothes.



“All right, let’s go swimming!”

“O—!”

“Did you bring the cooler box!”

“I did!”

“What about the contents!”

“Meat and vegetables and wine and beer!”

I wonder if those strange people I met yesterday have met up with adventurers?

Please work hard, I'll work hard to grill meat and swim in the river.

We borrowed two Riding Drake and the two of us rode abreast on the highway.

It had been a long time since I last used a Riding Drake.

The drake-type was the most common dragon species in the continent. They even had formal names like Wyvern or Poison Tail Drake.

Their difference compared to the dragon-type was the number of legs. Compared to dragon kind which possess four legs and a pair of wings, the drakes only have two legs and a pair of wings. Their intelligence was also closer to beasts so they could be trained to allow people to ride them like this.

The Riding Drake was the result of breeding to produce a type that has small vestigial wings but sturdy legs which allowed them to run like they were flying. Their sparkling brown scales were soft and warm to the touch. The eyelids that they developed allowed them to continue running while protecting their eyes from strong sunlight, dust or snow.

The disadvantage was the feeding cost. They ate three times the amount a horse ate and it had to be meat.

They could be found in rental shops run by the country in large towns and by showing identification as proof of citizenship, one could rent them by paying a 100 Peryl deposit fee. That 100 Peryl was nothing more than a deposit as it would be returned after deducting a fee of 3 Quarter Peryl a day when the drake was returned.

"As expected, a Riding Drake is better after all!"

Lit said like she was having fun.

The reason for choosing the expensive Riding Drake compared to a horse or a Riding Gecko was because she wanted to enjoy the breeze as she rode it.

The degenerated feathers of the Riding Drake could not gain lift but it caught the wind and softly jumped as it ran. That sensation was a pleasure unobtainable from riding other beasts but not many people rented a Riding Drake just to ride it.

Well, there were people attracted to the powerful running ability of the horse and also the three-dimensional acrobatic running ability of the Riding Gecko which could run on walls and ceilings. Among them, there were even people who enjoy the relaxing pace of the donkey which was originally a beast of burden. There were all kinds of people in the world.

Riding was a major interest among people who live with silver coins.

A strong gust blew and the Riding Drake's body flew into the air.

"Yahooooo!!!"

Lit cried out. I also unconsciously followed suit.

The Riding Drake lowered its head, spread its shiny wings and jumped close to 10 meters.

There was almost no shock from the landing. The two beasts had the Divine Protection of the Fighter so even though their level was low due to the lack of combat opportunities, their body status was raised so it was quite enjoyable.

"Sorry that you have to go along with my selfishness!"

"Don't worry, I have not ridden a Riding Drake for a long time but this exhilaration is greater than the price paid! This is fun!"

We went upstream of the river and it would take us an hour to reach the clear stream at the foot of a nearby mountain. Of course, we could not continue at this pace the entire trip but for now, we let the Riding Drakes continue running to their heart's content as we cried out in joy.



I suddenly looked up at the sky and saw two Pegasus leisurely run in the sky with their wings spread.

"A couple huh, looks like we are close to the Pegasus breeding ground."

The Pegasus with large white feathers on their horse body affectionately circled the sky. Even among the monsters, Pegasus was known to be extremely mild-mannered so many lands prohibit the hunting of Pegasus. In addition, although not to the extent of the Owlbear, their kicks have enough force to kill even a Grizzly so they bred extensively in the Avalon Continent.

Although their numbers have dwindled due to over-hunting in the Dark Continent.

“Sorry for the wait, let’s swim.”

Lit was wearing a halter neck bikini which was a type of swimwear where the top exposed the shoulders and was tied to the neck. Her ample bust that was normally hidden under her clothes moved with her steps so I was troubled as to where to look.

But when I stood behind her, her exposed back with well-toned muscles was...

As I looked at Lit from behind, Lit spun around.

“Mufufu.”

Noticing the movement of my gaze, Lit covered her mouth with her hand and laughed with satisfaction.

Having reached the river, we decided to first have a swim before preparing the barbecue. Lit took out a small tent from her item box and we changed our clothes there.

...Just a little, I imagined us changing with our backs to each other but I wasn’t wrong. That’s normal for men. Yup.

“I’m probably a lot more excited than I imagined.”

This isn’t like me, I thought to myself but when Lit took my hand and pulled me into the water with her and the cold caused Lit and I to exclaim; when we splashed water on each other like kids; when Lit dived into the water and broke the water surface; I

inadvertently felt my lips loosen.

The troubling point was that Lit noticed that. But Lit was also smiling brightly so we were even.

“It’s about time we have our lunch.”

“All right.”

This time, I extended my hand to her. Lit showed a look of surprise for a moment.

“Thanks!”

Before she thanked me and grabbed my hand.



Romance was inherent to knights. In knight tales, there would always be a damsel in need of saving, a talented girl who helped the knight when he faced difficulties or a witch who surrendered to the knight and became good friends with him.

However, I never had such encounters. I also never heard such stories actually happening to my fellow knights.

The point I’m getting to is that I was scouted to be a knight from a young age, went through countless adventures, and formed a party with the Hero Ruti ever since leaving the village so my love experience was zero.

Of course, when I was vice-captain, such tales were brought up. However, I knew that Ruti possessed the Divine Protection of the Hero and understood even before I became a knight that I would follow her on her journey.

I didn’t have the time to think about love. When I traveled with Ruti, I made connections with influential people who would serve as the shields on our backs and earned money so that we would not have to struggle with finances.

That was why...

(I don't know what to talk about...)

Lit and I sat side by side as we ate grilled meat and vegetable and drank wine.

We were talking about normal topics at the start but we were both conscious of each other so the conversation died off and now we sat in silence while sipping wine.

I threw a fleeting glance to my side and Lit also seemed to have the same idea as our gazes met. We both hurriedly averted our eyes and our faces dyed red.

“...Bukuku.”

“...Fufufu.”

“”Ahahaha...!””

We laughed out loud. We're terrible, even a children couple could do better than us.

“I thought that Lit would be a lot more used to it.”

“What, do you see me as such a person?”

“No no, after all, you were quite assertive when you came to my shop.”

“My heart was trembling thinking about what if you rejected or if you had forgotten about me... Actually, I thought that Red would be a lot more used to it too.”

“Why?”

“Your expression was always calm without the slightest change even when I tried my best to appeal to you. It was like you considered me a child who was trying to overstretch myself.”

“I thought that it would be uncool if I was all lovestruck.”

The two of us opened our hearts and laughed while feeling refreshed.

I moved closer to Lit and she also moved closer and our exposed shoulders touched.

“Shall we open another bottle of wine? Or go for another swim?”

“Nah~... I’d like to stay like this a little longer.”

“Hn... all right, let’s do that.”

Looks like both our love experience was at level 1.

Overlapped hands, touching shoulders and the body warmth that could be felt.

We were two inexperienced adults who were satisfied with just that.

Well, it’s not bad.

“But.”

“Hn?”

I turned to Lit in response to her words.

Lit’s eyes were in front of mine.

Lit moved slightly. I felt a soft sensation touch my lips.

We stayed that way for a moment... before we moved apart.

“I wanted to at least... progress this much.”

Lit said as she looked down slightly with her hand covering her lips but that action was too cute and I embraced Lit before I knew it.

Chapter 21

Shadows over Zoltan

The next day.

From today on its work, back to routine.

“Well then, let’s get to work.”

“It’s good to have spirit but there’s nothing to do in particular.”

Lit smiled wryly. That was the reality.

“There’s plenty of free time in an apothecary huh.”

“It is the opposite of other businesses that focus on small profits but large volume. Having said that, we’re not like Stom’s furniture store which takes a long time to manufacture one product nor doctors like Doctor Newman who have to keep an eye on their patient records.”

Just selling a small number a day would give us plenty of profit.

Also, the regular re-stocking of the various hospitals through Newman’s recommendation gave me a peace of mind.

“Oh right, how’s Red’s Analgesic?”

“For now, I intend to attach the documents and distribute them to the clinics.”

“It’s a new drug so it would take some time for it to be recognized. What about the antidote for that other analgesic?”

“That hasn’t moved at all. When Lit was watching the store, the orders didn’t increase at all.”

“Yeah, there has only been one case of poisoning which was the person Red administered first aid to.”

So only one case has happened.

“But I heard rumors from the adventurers that the analgesic was quite widespread.”

It was not limited to just Zoltan as the analgesic has been spread to all cities.

In this continent where everyone fights all the time, usage of medicine to eliminate pain was commonplace. A drug like that causes dependency and while it won't be a problem if it was taken in moderate amounts, fighting and using it for consecutive days would lead to addiction and the person would crave it even when it was not needed.

But as most families with middle income and above always stock up the comparatively cheaper analgesic medicine opium, trying to stop medicine abuse might be a tall order.

“So, how does that analgesic drug work?”

“Similar to Red's Medicine, it was applied for use as an analgesic medicine to remove pain but it has three times the usual dosage and you would apparently experience euphoria and a sense of liberation if you place it under your tongue instead of swallowing it.”

As expected of a B-rank adventurer. She has investigated it in detail even though she only did it during her free time.

“Also, I heard about it but I couldn't really understand but... they said that you could become a new you.”

“A new you? Is that different from the sense of liberation?”

“No, the dealers selling the merchandise emphasized on the 'new you' part.”

An analgesic that would make you a new person?

What's the deal with that?

“Is it a magic potion? But a magic potion must be in liquid form.”

In the first place, magic potions which reproduce the effect of spells can't bypass the procedure of having to manually apply the spells one-by-one into the potion so they can't be mass produced.

That should be incompatible with this round's drug which was prepared in large quantities in advance to be sold at one go.

“Or rather, magic potions aren't treated as new medicine so there's no need to get permission in the first place.”

I guess the effect of the drug was demonstrated through the production using medicinal grass like the medicine I made. Although I had no idea what that 'a new you' was about.

“Maybe they got an analgesic recipe from a Wild Elf?”

“No way no way, if it was such a huge discovery, they won't base it at Zoltan but somewhere much larger scale or they could obtain a huge sum just by bringing it to the Alchemist Guild.”

Wild Elves are Elves who did not adapt to civilization and live in mountain hinterlands. They have been called Wild Elves since the age of the Wood Elves so some scholars even consider them as direct descendants of the Ancient Elves.

Just once, I infiltrated a Wild Elf community but I really got a shock when I saw that they didn't even have a single hut and the Wild Elves slept exposed to the elements like beasts. Naturally, they were fully naked as well.

Even in such conditions, they didn't have body odor and although their faces and bodies were dirty, due to the strong life force native to Elves, they still looked beautiful so the Elf race is seriously amazing.

Now that I think it, that was the rare occurrence when Ruti was angry at me when I

accidentally caught a glimpse of the Elves' breast. I suddenly thought of it and felt a sense of nostalgia.

Even though the Wild Elves live akin to beasts and regardless of not possessing a language, they have a wealth of knowledge and bringing a fragment of that knowledge to the human world would make you earn a fortune.

I could understand the suspicion that the analgesic drug this time might have come from the Wild Elves but... there would be no meaning in selling it all the way at Zoltan in the frontier.

"Maybe this was after they sold it somewhere else and got kicked out."

"Perhaps the information didn't reach Zoltan."

Well, let's put an end to worrying about it. We're not going to reach an answer anyway.

At that time, the door to the shop burst open.

A man drenched in blood flew into the shop as if rolling in.

"Lit!"

As soon as I shouted, Lit had already brought my medicine case over. As expected of Lit, I calmly thought to myself as I approached the man.

"Are you all right? I'll be examining you okay."

The man wanted to tell me something but he seemed to be in a panic as he couldn't articulate and could only brandish his limbs violently.

"Red, sedative!"

Lit tossed me a small bottle of medicine from behind. That was a reckless act that

would never occur in a regular apothecary but Lit and I would never miss a toss.

I kept my eyes on the man and held him down with my right hand while I used my left hand to grab the medicine. I quickly opened the lid and held it close to the man's nose.

The man's eyes flickered for a moment before he calmed down as if his strength was drained from him.

"Very good."

I quickly looked at the condition of the man's injuries. I could see three terrible injuries. All of them were made by a thick blade which gouged him deeply.

This is bad, it will be too late if I don't handle it now.

But... I must also investigate what is happening outside.

"Lit, please pass me hemostatic agent and bandages only. And could you bring your weapon and check the situation outside?"

"So you're saying the injury is not due to an accident. All right."

Lit passed me the medicine, picked up her favorite shotel and went out without letting her guard down.

Chapter 22

Lit, noon duel

Lit moved away from Red and looked around the surroundings after she exited the shop.

There wasn't anybody around but she could hear screams and angry shouts from the distance. It was most likely coming from the road two streets down across the building. The trail of blood which likely came from the man who dashed into the shop also led to that alley.

Lit followed the trail of blood. Judging by the man's injuries, he wouldn't have run a great distance.

When she entered the alley,

"Uwaaaaa!!!"

A running screaming man appeared in front of Lit.

Lit instantly dropped low and,

"To!"

She nimbly danced in the air.

She leaped over the man's head and continued running in a flash.

Despite seeing that amazing acrobatics feat, the man just continued running away.

(Looks like it wasn't a fight.)

The man's eyes showed that he was in a panic from a threat to his life. Lit could vividly recall those eyes, the same eyes the people had as they tried to escape from the Demon Lord army's assault.

Even though she understood that the Asura Demon Shisandan couldn't possibly be ahead, Lit still tightly clutched the handle of the sword in her hand.

When she dashed out into the street, a monster like the Asura Demon was not there as expected.

However, there was an unexpected person.

Six bleeding men and women were on the ground. There were both people moaning while pressing against their wounds and also people who died instantly with their heads split open. Among the fallen men was one guard with a spear in hand. His iron helmet was crushed and his face in the sea of blood did not show a single twitch or sign of movement.

The three men who could easily be identified as the culprits each had blood-drenched battle axes hanging loosely by their sides and had neurotic twisted smiles on their faces.

Glaring at the man in the center, Lit lowered her voice and said.

"...You are the Thief in Albert's party."

Lit was surprised on the inside. Even if he was just a side character beside Albert, that man was still a person from the strongest party in Zoltan.

"Lit, Lit, Litoooooo..."

Lit intuitively felt that he was not sane. The other two men also did not show daunted expressions even though the hero Lit was standing in front of them.

In fact, the three of them were gnashing their teeth to intimidate her.

“What is wrong with you guys?”

There was no way Lit was close to Albert’s companions. However, as a B-rank adventurer, she had occasionally conversed with them.

That man’s name was Pick Campbell if she remembered correctly. Even though he had his cruel side, he should be a person with true adventurer spirit.

However, the appearance of the B-rank adventurer in front of her was far from that of an intelligent being. His appearance was akin to a monster which lacks reasoning.

Campbell raised his axe and charged forward. Lit stayed rooted in place and readied her shotel as she waited.

(He’s fast, and his movements are sharp. Is this actually an opponent who possesses the Divine Protection of the Thief?)

The rushing Campbell entered the space between him and Lit and swung his axe down. Lit took a single step forward.

Campbell’s axe cut through the air and the two of them crossed paths.

Campbell’s arm fell to his side loosely and the battle axe fell to the ground with a clang.

His clothes slowly dyed red as if his body just remembered that it was cut and then he collapsed.

The two other men were startled and they quickly readied their axes.

At that moment, the sound from the tap of a foot kicking off from the ground was transmitted.

The man felt that it happened in an instant.

Even though there should still have been a distance, Lit’s sword was quickly approaching the man.

There was a sound of violently clashing metal.

“Mu?”

But the shotel blade was stopped by the handle of the man’s battle axe.

Lit was slightly surprised but she twisted her shotel with flowing movements.

The curved blade extended beyond the battle axe and the sharp edge sliced into the man’s flank, reaching his internal organs.

After pulling her blade back, the man dropped to one knee as he bled.

“Hii!!”

Surprisingly the last person showed a horrified expression and fled.

As if the madness he had just moments ago was a lie.

Lit was just about to chase after him.

“Aga!?”

An arrow streaked out from the alley and pierced through the side of the man’s head, pinning him to the wall of the building.

There was no need to check, he died instantly.

“Albert.”

Lit directed a fierce gaze towards the alley.

At the alley was Albert who had a crossbow raised and the doctor Newman.

“Sorry, it seems that my companions have troubled you.”

Albert said with a humbled expression.

“Albert, what is the meaning of this?”

“I don’t know either. I did not imagine him to be a man to commit such violence.”

Albert’s phrasing sounded as if it was other people’s affairs.

Even though his companion had just died.

“More importantly, shouldn’t you be treating the fallen?”

“O-oh right.”

Newman hurriedly approached the injured people while hugging his bag.

“I would like your fiancé to come here too. I don’t mind if you send the medicine charges to me.”

Even though Albert nearly got killed by Lit just yesterday, he didn’t seem like he was bothered by it. He said it with his usual conceited tone.

Lit did not like it. The Divine Protection within Lit was starting to shout at her to [Kill your enemy].

“Oh, I’ll be helping the doctor so excuse me.”

Perhaps he felt the rising killing intent from Lit as Albert ran from Lit’s eyes and moved to Newman’s side.

”.....”

Clang! There was a metallic sound. Albert turned back with shock to look at Lit.

Lit thrust her right hand directly forward and then opened her grip to let the sword

fall. Albert looked on with a puzzled expression.

That was a ritual Lit performed to regain herself when she was attacked by the impulse to move according to her Divine Protection. To thrust with the hand holding her weapon and open it to drop her weapon.

Then, Lit picked up her weapon with her left hand and slowly sheathed it.

“Fu.”

She finally exhaled.



Two of the victims died instantly. One person from the surviving four died before he could be treated. The other three had serious injuries but they were able to hold on to their lives.

There were seven in total including the victim who ran into my shop. Among which, three of them were Half-Elves. Of them, the Half-Elf Keno lost his life. The rest were humans.

Thankfully, Newman encountered them on his way to my shop and that despite having been cut countless times by the axes, half of them could survive so it could be said to be a blessing among the misfortune.

Also, for standing forward with bravery, the guard Arthur who was killed received commendation from the Zoltan congress. As he had a wife and two daughters, they would receive a yearly pension.

However, even though the stout-hearted wife could claim that she was proud that her husband bravely fought to buy time for the citizens to escape, the daughters beside the resolute mother cried loudly in her stead.

A B-rank adventurer going mad.

It was a headache-inducing scandal for the Adventurers Guild but since Lit retired

midway, Albert's party has been given special treatment.

Albert apologized for the mismanagement of his companion with a sorrowful expression but he still added a new companion to his party and will probably continue his adventurer work.

"So nothing changed in particular."

I put the block printed news that I was reading beside me.

It has been a week since that tragedy. A cooling wind was finally blowing outside but nothing else has changed apart from that.

"Who did the autopsy?"

Lit, who had her head on my knees, asked. It was the famous lap pillow posture.

Lately, she has taken to that position and she would slide her body over whenever she saw the chance.

To be honest, I actually wanted to be given a lap pillow instead.

"Well, it was not written in the news but do you think they lost their sanity because of the drug?"

"I don't think so... besides, they were a lot stronger than expected. I can only imagine that they were enhanced by drugs instead."

"Hou."

"I have seen the movements of Albert's companion, Campbell, before. I wouldn't be able to say he was strong even if I wanted to flatter him. But that time, he had an intimidating aura that made me feel that I could not carelessly cut him. Even the other man, a person who can receive my sword even once can't possibly be unknown in Zoltan."

"The other two men were apparently C-rank adventurers and Campbell's ex-party mates. They still got along even after Campbell transferred to Albert's party but... it is true that taking their experience into consideration, it is unthinkable that they are

capable of stopping Lit's sword."

"Right?"

Lit shouldn't be mistaken as she actually fought them.

Did they use an enhancement potion?

"Won't they be able to tell by testing for any drug reactions when they investigate their blood?"

"If they have the skill and test drug... I'm more concerned about why Campbell, a person with the Divine Protection of the Thief, was using an axe."

"I take it you have never heard of a person who wields an axe while having the Divine Protection of the Thief."

"Of course. The Divine Protection of the Thief favors light weapons. A large majority of their unique skills can't be used with a weapon like an axe."

That was why his usage of an axe was incomprehensible to me. Of course, it was possible that he used an axe because he didn't have any other weapons but...

"I can't imagine he was cornered to the point that he didn't have any other weapons."

"Moreover, to contest with me with such a makeshift weapon... is unbelievable."

"True."

The mystery only deepened.

"What shall we do, should I investigate a little?"

Lit asked as she looked up towards me.

"...I wonder."

A murder happened just outside the shop.

There were many inexplicable aspects and it was possible that there were various things happening behind the scenes.

“What does Lit want to do?”

“I just want to fall asleep like this.”

She said and closed her eyes while lying on my lap.

“...Fumu.”

I wondered what to do as I stroked Lit’s hair.

Ah, that sensation made me recall the cat that lived in the dormitory I stayed in during my knight apprenticeship days.

Chapter 23

Al and Tanta

The door bell chimed.

“Red-oniichan, I’m here to play~”

“Go-good afternoon.”

Just as I was thinking that it was about time I prepared lunch, the Half-Elf children pair Tanta and Al came to my shop.

“Yo, Tanta, Al, welcome, I was just thinking of making lunch. Do you want to eat?”

“Yup!”

“A-as long as it doesn’t trouble you.”

“You don’t need to worry about troubling people while you are still a kid. I’ll be done right away so wait for a bit.”

I had the two of them wait in the living room.

Lit was practicing swings in the garden and she would probably return soon.



“Wa, meat spaghetti!”

“I like this too.”

Tanta and Lit were innocently pleased.

However, Al eyes swam showing that he was troubled.

“Hey, Lit.”

“Hmm?”

“You’re troubling Al so why don’t you put a jacket on something on?”

Even though it had become slightly cooling, Zoltan’s afternoon was still hot. Lit, having made practice swings in the sun, seemed to have washed away her perspiration in the washroom before coming over.

She was currently dressed casually in a tank top and short pants. That was a little too stimulating for Al going through puberty as he was red-faced stealing glances at Lit.

But, when I told Lit that...

“I-it’s okay! I’m not looking at all!!”

Al raised his voice shrilly.

Eh?

“Red~ You should not have done that.”

“E-eh? Was I wrong?”

“Yeah, you should have acted like you didn’t know even if you noticed something like that. A boy going through puberty won’t want somebody to expose him like that.”

“Red-oniichan doesn’t have tact after all.”

Eh?

“I see, sorry.”

“I-it’s okay! More importantly, let’s eat!”

Al shouted with a beet red face and some tears at the corner of his eyes.

Sorry, I'm really sorry.



At first, Al was stiff but as our meal progressed he threw away his reservations.

"You can have seconds."

His eyes sparkled when I told him that so I smiled to myself thinking that he was still a child after all.

"Then I'll have seconds!"

Lit immediately replied but she most probably said that in consideration for Al and Tanta so that they won't be reserved.

"A big serving please!"

She was probably being considerate.

After our meal, Al patted his belly with a satisfied look.

It was the right choice to prepare more servings.

"It was delicious."

"I eat this every day."

Lit was feeling proud of it for some reason and Tanta seemed to have finally realized her character as he stared at her with eyes of amazement.

I laughed and spoke to Tanta.

"That's the kind of person she is. Quite ridiculous."

“But it is?”

“Cute.”

“Stupid couple!”

Tanta stared at me with reproachful eyes.

Yeah, I was aware that I had become a little silly.

Tanta sighed loudly.

“Al~ I wonder if we are intruding?”

“Ahaha.”

Placing tea and cookies on the table, we peacefully chatted while joking around.

“Oh right, Red-san, I also made contact with my Divine Protection yesterday.”

“Is that so, how was it?”

“I am worried... but I have not felt any impulses as of now. But it is more of an indistinct feeling of unease.”

“That’s probably because you have not decided on what weapon to wield. You probably won’t feel a sudden impulse but more of a gradual feeling of uneasiness.”

“Then if I continue like this, would I be able to remain as myself?”

As expected, he was still worried about his Divine Protection’s impulses.

“But continuing to hang on to that uneasiness will be tough. And if you don’t get the skills given by your Divine Protection, everything you do will be inconvenient.”

“I was wondering if I could just survive with common skills...”

I was involuntarily at a loss for words.

Living by with just common skills huh...?

“It is not impossible but it will be awful.”

“I guess that’s true, ah~ if only I got the Divine Protection of the Warrior like my father.”

The Divine Protection of the Warrior was the most common lowest grade Divine Protection. Their unique skill only raised their physical ability and they do not have any unique abilities.

The advantage was that the corresponding urge was weak. It can be said to be the most sought-after Divine Protection for the general public to have.

Instead of a strong fighter like a Weapon Master, Al wished to be an ordinary person.

“You should at least choose a weapon that would be useful even in daily life.”

“Something useful in daily life?”

“Al, what do you want to be in the future?”

“Hn, I don’t know. I am currently working to unload goods at my father’s pier though.”

An unloading worker huh.

Right...

“For example, a knife. You would be able to quickly cut the ropes tying the goods and you could cut strong ropes that others won’t be able to cut. Although it can’t be said to be that strong as a weapon.

Another choice would be a rope dart. It is a weapon made of rope with a 15cm metal blade at the tip but mastering it would help you with maneuvering rope.

An unusual choice would be a battle ladder. It is a 1.5m ladder originally designed to be used for small sieges but they have designed a martial arts system for the troops

carrying it for melee fights. It is made to be narrower than regular ladders and you could use it purely as a blunt weapon or to stop your opponent's feet and trip them. There's also the advantage of a secondary effect where you would be better at high-altitude work."

I taught Al all kinds of unusual weapons.

At first, Al was not interested in weapons but after talking about all kinds of unusual weapons that he had never seen before, he was slowly enthralled and was soon pestering me for a detailed explanation on the kinds of weapons there were.

"Amazing! Even monsters can create weapons!"

"Yeah that's right, apart from the troll hammer, there are goblin blades too."

"Goblin blade?"

"As you know, goblins have small bodies but they love large weapons. They want to use greatswords or great axes that humans use which do not suit their physique. But they can't use them due to the weight. So, the goblins used their brains which they usually don't use and figured out to punch holes in the weapons to lighten them."

"Eh..."

"Those are goblin blades. They make holes to reduce the weapon's weight by about half."

"Won't that break the weapon?"

"It will. In exchange for reducing the weight by half, the weapon durability is dreadful. I often heard funny stories where their weapons snap in the middle of a battle and the goblin tilt their head in confusion before being killed."

Al laughed like he was enjoying himself.

It looked like his interest in weapons has surpassed his worry about his Divine Protection.

"A Weapon Master can only choose his weapon once. You cannot change it after you make your decision. So do not be hasty and take your time to choose."

“Okay... Thank you Red-san. You taught me a lot once again.”

It was the beginnings of a young Weapon Master.

I could only give him advice for the very start but I prayed that the child would traverse a life where he comes to an understanding with his own Divine Protection.

Chapter 24

The role of the Hero

“Give me all the gray starfish medicine you have!”

“Sorry, I am getting orders from the other clinics as well so if you are fine with just 30 doses.”

“Ooo, you have so much stock, that saves me. The other apothecaries had all sold out.”

Doctor Christopher who opened his clinic in the residential area of the congress street gladly bought the medicine.

Two months after Johnson’s drug overdose, patients were being carried to hospitals every day and the gray starfish medicine used for emergency treatment was selling like hotcakes.

“Lit, please take care of the shop in the afternoon. I will go prepare the medicine.”

“All right. The situation is awful.”

“Yeah, this is poisoning beyond that of an analgesic drug.”

The analgesic drug was certainly terrifying but the disability slowly eroded the body. The goal of the analgesic drug was to experience euphoria and a sense of release so even if the users developed heavy dependency and harmed their bodies, there would not be a large number of serious patients coming in a couple of months.

“Why do they use such a dangerous drug? Is it that addictive?”

I had no idea. The doctors asked the patients but they only repeatedly replied that they could become a new person so the findings were inconclusive.

“That Thief which was Albert’s companion also used that analgesic drug.”

“What?”

So that drug was the cause of that tragedy.

“Isn’t that analgesic drug dangerous?”

“Even the Congress that wanted to implement phases to prohibit it at the start have thrown away their reluctance to lose face and have started conducting raids. The person-in-charge, Dan, has probably been fired too.”

Poor man. I guess I should give him some gastric medicine after all.

“However, the characteristics are still unknown and they still couldn’t analyze the new drug even after inviting people with Advanced Compounding skill. It looks really possible that it is a Wild Elf drug.”

The number of people with greater skill than that, people with Expert Compounding skill, could probably be counted with a single hand in this continent. The only person I was directly acquainted with was the High Elf who came to the silver town Muzari to look for mithril, Witch Empress 「Baba Yaga of Winter」. Baba Yaga was a legendary figure with the Divine Protection of the Winter Queen that only two people in history among the Witch System have ever recorded to have.

Production skills like compounding which has no direct influence in combat have slightly lower value. Only people like Baba Yaga who are over level 60 have large amounts of skill points to spend on such skills.

“It is essentially impossible to investigate it with skills.”

“Are there no other methods to analyze it apart from the Compounding skill?”

“Hn, that’s a little difficult. Although it might be possible if the materials used was known.”

There's also the option of investigating the properties of the materials and piecing together the knowledge from there.

But there is an overwhelming number of uncommon materials. There isn't anybody who would take the effort to investigate using knowledge if it could be understood by just using a skill.

"Looks like I will have to harvest medicinal herbs again."

The Adventurers Guild has released the gathering request for gray starfish grass but the location where it grows in abundance was a chimera breeding ground so only people around my level can step foot there to harvest. If they have the ability to defeat a chimera, the price of their work has somewhat risen so they won't even look at medicinal grass harvest requests.

I don't intend to be an adventurer but I will do as much as possible for the apothecary.



"Er, Albert-san, are we really doing this?"

"What are you talking about after we've come this far?"

Albert sent a cold gaze after hearing the female Monk mutter.

However, their companion the Earth Magician, the Warrior and the newly-joined Thief also had the same uneasy expression as the female Monk.

"Why are we in such a place?"

The Warrior muttered quietly.

Albert stifled his urge to shout and motioned his companions to follow.

Albert's party was in a cave along the shore to the south of Zoltan.

Monsters called a Giant Scrag with a beast-like face, rough blue skin and 4-meter stature lived there.

The Scrag was a type of Giant Troll and were also called the Marine Troll.

It depended on the growth of their Divine Protection but most Scrag were about level 9. Compared to the cruel trolls, Scrag don't necessarily attack indiscriminately but...

"Even though they have such unpleasant faces, those Scrag treasure their own tribal children very much. To the extent that they won't let a single one starve to death."

Explained the Earth Magician.

The Scrag do fish on their own but they obtain anything else through pillaging. The Scrag who come from the sea would make settlements and they will normally not pose a problem but children will be born once the breeding season is over and they will attack surrounding settlements to gather food and resources.

If that repeats itself every year, their numbers will increase and a Scrag 'kingdom' will be made.

"That's why we will exterminate them before they enter the breeding season."

"But something like this should be the job for C-rank parties right?"

The Scrag possess regenerative abilities that can even reconnect torn arms if the limbs were held in place but they are weak to fire. With just a single shot of the classic Fireball which all individuals with magic-using Divine Protection learn as their very first spell when they reach level four, the majority of the Scrag would be incapacitated while the survivors would lose their regenerative abilities.

If one had companions with Divine Protection that can use Fireball, the Scrag were not foes to be frightened of as long as they retained enough magical power to cast Fireball.

Even if they don't have Fireball, there are other spells that they can use from Divine Protection level 1 such as Firebolt which shoots out a fire arrow or Burning Hands which releases a small breath-like jet of flames from the palm.

The fire spells are excellent for attacking and they can deal stronger attacks from a lower level compared to water or earth spells.

The fact that fire was their weak point was the main element that lowered the threat level of the monster.

“I have my hands full from handling all the abandoned request because of the idling adventurers during summer. The danger is low as long as the Scrags have not entered breeding season so probably nobody would accept the request.”

Furthermore, it was actually more lucrative to defeat the Scrags after they start plundering. Since the plundered items would become important sources of income for the adventurers.

“That’s why we have to do it. Those with power have the duty to use it. Know that it is a sin the longer you keep your sword sheathed.”

Albert’s companions were verbally praising and complimenting him but their eyes clearly had looks of contempt.

You should do it yourself!

Albert shook his head slightly.

Albert’s Divine Protection was [The Champion]. Divine Protection level 24. That Divine Protection was a hero’s Divine Protection to overcome difficulties and achieve great feats. It was one of the superior Divine Protections in the warrior class and its corresponding impulse was to display their power to the world and perform feats that will leave their names in history.

Compared to his great ambitions, his companions had ordinary Divine Protection and little ambitions. That was why Albert was exasperated. Albert could not utilize such a mighty Divine Protection on his own and could only follow the flow to Zoltan.

“It’s about time we set out.”

Albert drew his sword.

“E-erm, that sword?”

The Monk looked at the strangely-shaped sword Albert held.

The blade was thick and seemed weighty. The guard was small and it seemed easy to have your fingers sliced off.

A characteristic that was even more unique was the round tip which made it impossible to thrust with.

That was a sword that an executioner would use.

“My previous sword broke and I thought I wouldn’t be able to get a magic sword of that grade so easily but I got this off a peddler for a bargain so I was saved.”

That sword fraught with rust contrasted against Albert’s shining armor that was as good as new.

“There’s no inscription. But the cutting edge is extraordinary. I named it ‘Vorpal · Blade (Beheading blade)’.”

The Monk used the spell ‘Detect Magic’ to visualize magical power.

She was instantly overwhelmed by a staggering aura and she inadvertently fell backward.

“Sorry, I should have explained earlier. I don’t know who made it but this is a masterpiece made by a person with legendary weapon crafting skills. Swords that can surpass this weapon would probably only be the ‘Demon Slaying Holy Sword’ held by the Hero Ruti. Just the magic aura alone would knock out somebody with superficial levels.”

“A-a peddler had something like that?”

The Monk asked while still seated.

Albert showed a friendly smile and offered his hand.

“I was lucky.”

Since he said that, the Monk didn’t have any words to reply with.



Albert’s party had already conquered the majority of the Scrag’s nest.

Only the last room remained.

It was a cave so there wasn’t even a door as Albert and his party stepped into the room.

“Ah...”

The Monk unconsciously said that when she saw the scene.

There were three Scrag. Judging from their sagging breasts, they were all female.

However, two of the Scrag were seated in a defensive posture and the remaining Scrag’s appearance overwhelmed the Monk.

The belly of that Scrag was greatly swollen.

In an instant, the Monk’s exhilaration from battle and the impulse from her Divine Protection have completely blown away. Her ethics and more importantly, her identity as a woman sympathized with how the Scrag were pressed against a corner but still showed intent to fight back.

The Monk took a step backward. Her thoughts were paralyzed and she had trouble

breathing.

However,

“So she is already pregnant. It was the correct choice to address this as soon as possible.”

Albert said without emotion. He sent a straight cut that easily cut through the two Scrag protecting their brethren’s child.

The last remaining Scrag raised a battle roar for her dead companions and in order for her child to survive. It was a roar that made one think it would tear her throat.

“Hmph.”

Albert snorted and mowed down the Scrag mother who fought to her last claw.

That single strike was exceedingly light and two lives were snatched away all too easily.

The battle had ended.

He realized that tears flowed from the Monk’s eyes.

“Are you all right?”

Albert cared for the Monk with a gentle voice. The hand that slaughtered the Scrag mother was placed on the shoulder of the Monk to comfort her.

“Why...”

The Monk was unable to think rationally and said whatever was on her mind. She could not stop herself.

“Those women were only trying to care for their children! We are the same too, no, they might even be much nobler compared to us!”

“There’s no such thing, those were monsters.”

“For example... can’t we form a relationship where we provide them with food and they defeat the surrounding monsters in exchange!”

Albert smiled kindly and showed an expression like an adult admonishing a child who could not understand the reason.

“Our Divine Blessings do not wish for that.”

Yes, that’s right... this world was filled with battles.

Chapter 25

Hero Ruti's night alone

Late night.

Hero Ruti was alone seated in the middle of a tent as she continued to ponder with her eyes shut.

The Divine Blessing of the Hero gave all kinds of resistances.

Among them was complete immunity to sleep.

Ruti no longer needed sleep. She would never feel drowsy.

She would maintain a perfect condition 24 hours a day without needing to sleep at all.

But her companions could not do the same. Ruti understood that camping out was required.

(Nevertheless, this time is boring.)

The time where she did nothing but just continue seating.

According to the mantra she secretly held, normal resistance and complete immunity were completely different.

Normal resistance was to become stronger against something but complete immunity was to lose something.

In this case, what she lost was the ability to sleep.

(But it was better when Onii-chan was here.)

She wouldn't get bored if she just stared at the face of her brother sleeping beside her.

She could feel his heartbeat just by placing her hand on his chest... she truly felt that she could even endure an eternity with that.

Well, she could also hug him a little... or nibble his fingers or ears or stomach. Small mischief... and those were her true feelings as well.

(That bastard Ares...)

Normally she wouldn't even be satisfied if she tore him apart limb by limb. However, as long as her companions do not hold malicious intent toward her, she was incapable of harming them.

That was because she was the Hero. A Hero would not harm their companion over their personal grudges.

Furthermore, she had complete immunity to the berserk status even if she was angry so it was just to the extent of minor waves of emotion.

Hero Ruti had lost the majority of her human emotions and preferences due to the Divine Protection of the Hero.

However, that day...



"Ruti, don't be alarmed and listen to me. Your Onii-san has left the party."

One day, the Sage Ares came to Ruti's room in the morning and told her.

Due to her complete immunity to confusion, Ruti calmly understood his words.

Due to her complete immunity to despair, Ruti was not shaken by those words.

That was why she only said a word.

“Why?”

That was all she asked.

“Gideon feels that his own ability is insufficient and instead of traveling with us, he feels that he would be more useful if he performed reconnaissance on the Demon Lord army and did guerrilla warfare. I initially stopped him but he was determined. Furthermore, his words were reasonable and were able to convince me. In the end, I decided to send him off with good grace. He even left all his equipment. Saying that it would serve us better. He was a man I looked up to.”

“Why did he tell that to you? Why did he not say it to me?”

“He probably didn’t want to show you his unattractive side. Even though he is drastically weaker than you, he is still your brother. It’s a charming pride. I can appreciate it too.”

(I see, so this guy chased Onii-chan away.)

Slipping through her various complete immunities, there was a slight fluctuation in Ruti’s emotions.

“Hiii...!?”

That alone caused a scream to leak from Ares. The intimidation emitting from Ruti intensely stimulated his survival instinct.

Nevertheless, Ares overpowered that feeling, knowing better than anyone else that he was competent through the guarantee from his Divine Protection and he went ahead with the action he planned for this occasion.

Ares clenched his teeth and hugged Ruti. His heart cringed in fear while the sweat flowing down his back was cold enough to freeze him.

Ares recited the words he had practiced repeatedly.

A Sage is excellent. He will accomplish any goal. Precisely because he is a wise man. That was Ares' role.

"I know that you are uneasy now that your Onii-san is no longer here. You are a girl before you are a Hero. Although the time I have spent with you might be shorter than the time Gideon had, I will always be your ally."

Even though he actually did that, Ruti could not thrust Ares away. She just glared at Ares with a chilly gaze and could only reproach him.

At that time, she sensed a presence.

(Onii-chan!?)

He saw me! He saw me!! He saw me!!!

The Divine Protection is housed in the mind.

However, at that time, her [human action] was quicker than her thoughts. Before the information reached her brain, all the cells in her body screamed in despair and acted.

"Uyogh!?!?!?!?!?"

Ares body bent forward.

That sound was unlike one made by man but the sound of air leaking from a balloon.

The world strongest punch hammered into Ares' abdomen, crushing his bones, bursting his internal organs and tore his blood vessels.

Ares' body slammed into the wall and more of his flesh, bones and internal organs lost their shapes. If the wall was not a magic-strengthened wall of a room meant for VIP use, even if his flesh and blood were soft, they would have ground the walls to dust.

Looking as if he was stomped on by a massive dragon, the Sage Ares fell to the floor.

“Onii-chan...!”

She wanted to chase after him. She wanted to resolve the misunderstanding as soon as possible.

However, her gaze fell on Ares who was on the brink of death.

A Hero does not abandon their companions. Even if abandoning them would save the world, even if it is an abominable person, she could not abandon them.

She clenched her teeth audibly. The fading presence burned her nerves.

But even so, she still tottered toward Ares.

Ares faintly retained his consciousness and stared at Ruti standing in front of him with fearful eyes.

Ruti held her hand over Ares.

Under the [Healing Hands], the dying Ares was healing before their eyes as his crushed body restored itself.

She could no longer sense the presence of her beloved brother. He had run off far away.

Even so, she only said this.

“Sorry.”

The Hero Ruti apologized to the Sage Ares.

Ares’ teeth clattered as he trembled.



Recalling that moment, Ruti enjoyed the slight waver in her heart.

It was one of the few memories she had of going against her Divine Protection of the Hero.

The pangs of painful emotions arising from her heart that slipped through the gaps of her encompassing immunity felt pleasant to her right now when she had too much spare time.

After that, Ruti wanted to chase after her brother immediately.

However, the role of the Hero was to save the people who were suffering. And defeating the Demon Lord Taraxon who was tormenting the people on the continent was a top priority that transcended all other circumstances.

A Hero could not stop their journey. Precisely because they are the Hero.

“But now I don’t have enough of Onii-chan.”

Ruti murmured softly.



Dawn was still far away.

Chapter 26

Today is a stormy day

“All right~ I have closed all the shutters. I have also kept all the medicinal grass in the garden that is likely to be blown off and only left those that are not ready for harvesting; well, it can't be helped even if they get damaged.”

“I have taken down the signboard and items that might get destroyed.”

A storm was coming to Zoltan.

The storm formed in the southern ocean traveled along the wall at the end of the world and moved northwest.

Although it was a little rare for it to come at the beginning of autumn, it was common for it to come by once every several years.

“Then, next would be the washroom!”

The winds outside had already become stronger.

The sky was also dark so it was just a matter of time before it started raining.

“According to the announcement from the Mineral Dragon Meteorological Observatory, the full-fledged storm would happen about dawn tomorrow?”

“Yup, the young Mineral Dragons flew around to give out the warnings.”

Fuyu, one of the four old dragons of light, an Ancient Mineral Dragon with a shiny black body of mica mineral, established a Mineral Dragon University on the summit of Mount Hyhelum in addition to a Crystal Observatory and was the greatest geologist in the continent of Avalon.

Young Mineral Dragons, aspiring Geologist and Elf youths visited and the old Mineral

Dragon generously imparted their knowledge.

One department of that Ancient Mineral Dragon University, the Ancient Mineral Dragon Meteorological Observatory, observed the weather of the entire Avalon Continent and gave out advance warnings for impending disasters.

The information from the Ancient Mineral Dragon Meteorological Observatory was indispensable for Zoltan that was battered by storms.

No matter if a person was a sailor or a farmer, the weather was a key element. The countries in the continent supported the academic castle run by the Ancient Mineral Dragon and announced their agreement to a non-aggression treaty in which various countries would cooperate to defend them during emergencies.

The Mineral Dragons were not of the Drake species but the Dragon species.

They were wise and loved to study the natural sciences.

As their scales were made of mica minerals, the uninformed would call them Stone Dragons but they would strongly correct their mistake by announcing 'I am a Mineral Dragon'. During such times, they would thrust their scales in front of the other party's eyes and clearly describe that black sheen.

To the four dragons of light, the brightness of their scales was their pride.

As they constructed research laboratories in various locations and continuously conducted their research for decades on end, even among the Light Dragons, they were reticent dragons when compared to the Radiant Dragons.

Radiant Dragons lived to bless the beginnings of future Heroes. When young children went on their first adventures, Radiant Dragons would shapeshift into humans to give them aid and they enjoy watching the growth of children during adventures. Comparatively, they were also the more frequently sighted dragons.

Well, foul-mouthed people called them shotacon dragons and lolicon dragons though.

I also adventured together with them when I was an apprentice Knight.

It was a little tough because he would break out into song whenever he was happy regardless of the situation... why did I have to be the one worrying about such things

when I was the child... but he was a good guy. If I remember correctly, that guy's name was called Alhazen.

The remaining Light Dragons are the Steam Dragons known to be engineers and the Lightning Dragons known to be watchmen.

The four Darkness Dragons that hail from the Darkness Continent are the nihilistic Vacuum Dragons, the Salt Dragons that symbolize stagnation and destruction, the child-abducting Ash Dragons and the Dust Dragons that pollute the land.

Dragons, along with humans and elves, were the three main races that live on the continent of Avalon. But then again, there didn't seem to be any of them in Zoltan. Perhaps it was a land that had no appeal even to the Dragons.

"Hey there! Stop slacking and move your hands!"

I was scolded.

"The water channel would be disrupted once the storm comes so we should store some water while we still can."

The inlet on the riverside for the water channel that drew water from the river would be closed before the storm. As it might get flooded with muddy water and the sudden torrent of water might damage it.

The wells would be murky from the heavy downpour and would not be usable for a while.

Even though Zoltan had an abundance of water resources, it would suffer from water shortages immediately after the storm. As a countermeasure against that, I poured water from the water channel into bags and barrels while I still could to stockpile water for daily use.

All households did the same so the water flow was ever so slight. It was a futile task that only served to pass time.

“I told you to do it yesterday but you were the one who went out to play with Gonz!”

“But I was invited...”

The carpenter Gonz would be extremely busy repairing the homes in the town once the storm was over. At times like these, even the lazy Zoltan people would have to give up on rest and work.

For that sake, Gonz wanted to go out and have fun in advance as the storm neared. It was setting a bad example for Tanta!

“You came along too!”

As I was complaining, Lit nimbly jumped on my back and clung to me.

“Well, get to work get to work.”

She imitated a horse rider, pretending to hit my bottom.

“Yes yes, I shall work, Lit-sama.”

“...Give me your attention to repay for the lack of yesterday.”

“All right, I won’t have anything to do for tomorrow and the day after anyway due to the storm.”

Oops, I stopped moving my hands.

I silently continued my work as I felt Lit’s body warmth as she hugged me harder.

Hn, this feeling kind of reminds me of something from the past...

(...Ah, I remember now.)

A storm was coming that time too. The storm was weaker compared to the ones that hit Zoltan but the villagers in my hometown were flustered because they were not used to storms.

Chapter 27

Hero and the stormy day of past

It was a stormy day.

It was rare that a storm would reach the village.

Therefore, there were many homes not sturdy enough to withstand a storm and we gathered everyone to the village elder's house that also functioned as a meeting place to seek refuge.

The wind howled outside. I could hear the sound of something getting blown away outside. There was an intense clap of thunder and the children around us who evacuated in the same way screamed.

At that time, I was eight years old. My younger sister Ruti was six years old.

Due to our special Divine Protections, the two of us were a lot calmer compared to the children our age.

"Motheerrrr!"

A slight distance away, a seated girl the same age as Ruti cried out and clung to her mother. "You're already six years old!" The mother was a little concerned with the gazes around her but she still gently patted the head of the girl clinging to her arm.

"....."

Ruti looked at that situation with her usual gaze... the people around said that the gaze was very cold but that was not true, her emotional expressions were just hard to understand... she stared intently at that scene.

I also looked around and saw many children similarly holding hands with their

parents or siblings.

Everyone was afraid.

“Ruti.”

“What is it?”

“Are you not afraid?”

“...Of the wind? Of thunder? Or of the possibility of the building collapsing and crushing everyone?”

She indifferently asked to confirm what I meant with calm and beautiful eyes and I slowly patted my younger sister’s head.

“Any one of that, are you afraid at this moment?”

“Nope, after all, I fear nothing.”

“I fear nothing.” Ruti once had a huge fight when she said that same phrase and clashed with a 13-year-old bully.

Even though she possesses the Divine Protection of the Hero, Ruti, a child with level 1 Divine Protection and no equipment nor combat experience, would have difficulty fighting against a bully leader, a youth who developed early with level 3 Divine Protection of the Warrior, though armed with just a club-like weapon, a thick cloth as armor and an old wooden shield, so she got beaten with the club and came home.

Even though Ruti actually possesses complete immunity to fear since birth and she only said that with that meaning in mind.

...Of course, after that I made that bully leader suffer the same amount of pain... well, maybe about 1.5 times... no, 2 times the pain, yup, probably about that much and had him apologize in front of Ruti.

Thanks to that, I ended up getting treated as the bully leader for some time after that. It was a hassle so I ordered an 11-year-old boy with the Divine Protection of the Cavalier to return the situation to its original state.

From then onward, the former bully leader behaved himself and never resorted to violence. He enjoyed violence not because of his Divine Protection but because he had never had the experience of losing in a fight.

“There’s nothing Ruti fears huh?”

“Onii-chan knows right?”

“Yup.”

Ruti tilted her head and showed that she couldn’t understand my intentions.

“Actually.”

“?”

“I am afraid.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Are you surprised?”

Ruti showed a slightly troubled expression.

She still did not have complete immunity to confusion at that time. That was why I thought she could be surprised.

“I am not surprised.”

“I see, you’re not surprised huh?”

“Yup.”

“Then, I’ll get back to topic. I am afraid... could you hold my hand?”

“Me?”

“Yes, Ruti’s hand.”

“Sure.”

I grasped Ruti's hand.

Regardless of how overwhelming the Divine Protection residing in her body was, that was the hand of a small girl.

"Are you not afraid anymore?"

"Yup, I'm no longer afraid."

"That's great."

Ruti smiled gently. Others... only mothers and fathers will understand the cuteness of such a smile. It is such a waste.

That was why I hogged it for myself. Until the day Ruti meets a person who can understand that smile.

"Sorry, I lied when I said I was afraid."

"A lie?"

"I'm totally not afraid."

"I see."

Ruti tilted her head further as she could not understand more and more.

"I just wanted to hold Ruti's hand."

"My hand?"

"Do you hate it?"

"I don't. But why?"

"There's no reason."

"None?"

"That's right, I have times I want to hold Ruti's hand for no particular reason."

“...Why?”

“There’s no reason... but, people do actions that have no reasons behind them.”

“Actions with no reasons.”

“Yup, I grasped Ruti’s hand for no particular reason. That’s why, if you have any time you have to hold my hand for no reason, you can do so at any time.”

“I see...”

Ruti stared at my hand that was connected to hers.

“Onii-chan.”

“Hm?”

“I love Onii-chan.”

That was rare.

Perhaps that was the first time Ruti expressed words of affection toward anything.

“Thank you, I’m happy.”

“Why?”

“Eh?”

“I am the one who said I love Onii-chan? Why is Onii-chan thanking me?”

I gently rustled Ruti’s hair.

Her striking blue hair brilliantly reflected the candlelight as I pat her head.

“Ruti, I love you too.”

“Mm.”

I have repeated those words to Ruti countless times.

In fact, my younger sister was unbearably cute.

“Ruti smiles when I say those words.”

Ruti looked shocked as she cutely touched her own face.

That gesture was also cute and I smiled gently.

“Smiling means happiness right?”

“Probably.”

“In other words, I am the same too, I feel happy when Ruti say you love me. I’m smiling now right?”

“Yup.”

“That’s why, thank you.”

Ruti deliberately pondered on the meaning of those words to understand them.

“All right.”

“You understand now?”

“Onii-chan, can I do things that have no meaning too?”

“Sure.”

Ruti let go of my hand.

Eh? Did she not like it?

But Ruti went around my back and hugged my head as she clung to me.

“This is better... is it all right?”

“Sure, you can do this anytime.”

“I see.”

She tightened her hug. I could feel her body warmth transmitted through my back.

“Onii-chan.”

“What is it?”

I looked back and naturally Ruti’s face was there.

“Thank you.”

Ruti showed a ‘full-faced smile’ that only I could understand.

For people who could understand that smile, it was a cute smile that could absolutely make them fall in love.

The person who can marry Ruti is super lucky. I’m starting to feel envious.

“Onii-chan, will you always be with me?”

“...Sorry, I cannot do that.”

“I see.”

After this storm passes. I will have to head to the town of Andaru where the Knight that scouted me awaits in order for me to become a Knight.

As far as I know, the monsters in the vicinity of this village do not contribute well to the growth of Divine Protections. Even though I had earnestly hunted monsters from the age of six, my level had only raised from 31 to 33. An Owlbear is too weak.

In preparation for the time I journey with Ruti, I must become as strong as I possibly can.

I do not know until when I can fight alongside her but... until the day Ruti is surrounded by lots of companions. Even if the opponent is the strongest Demon, I must be able to fight it.

“But, if Ruti has anything you don’t want to do, you can call me anytime. I will do it for you.”

“I know that.”

“Really?”

“You have told me many times.”

“I’ll be sad if you forget about me after all?”

A small ear was pressed to my back and Ruti stayed still.

“I’ll come back when I get a break. What do you want for a souvenir?”

“Honeyed milk.”

Ruti who was leaning on my back muttered that.



The journey to the Demon Lord and the slow life at the frontier named Zoltan.

I believed that our paths would never cross again. But,



“Are you searching for Gideon?”

A young man with black hair and dark skin said that to Danan.

Danan never had any talent for tracking and was at a loss for where to head without obtaining any leads so he was drinking in a tavern at the town Gideon broke off from

them. He could not find information on Gideon no matter where he looked.

“What?”

Danan was just feeling pleasant from being drunk so he glared at the youth. Actually, he did not mean to glare but Danan’s [Eyes of Intimidation] skill always spontaneously activated. Or rather, without consciously preventing it, his [Eyes of Intimidation] would activate on its own.

However, the youth was unruffled.

“You’re strong!”

“I cannot compare to you but my sword is slightly serviceable.”

“Hoooooh.”

“Leaving that aside, you’re looking for Gideon right?”

“What about it, do you know Gideon’s whereabouts?”

“No no, I have no idea. I just want to find Gideon too.”

“What”

Dana woke up from his drunken stupor.

He lightly shook his fist and glared at the youth in combat preparation.

“Shall we search for him together? I believe the effectiveness would be better if two people search together.”

The youth merely flashed a smile.

Chapter 28

Smoldering fire after the storm

The storm approached as the day turned to evening.

Strong winds blew outside as the horizontal rain kept a steady tempo like waves in the sea, leaving transient traces in the puddles.

“There’s no way there would be customers now so let’s close the shop.”

I closed the shop door and locked it from the inside.

Even though the door was only opened for a brief moment, the floor was already wet.

“Here.”

“Oh, thanks.”

I accepted the dust cloth from Lit and wiped the floor.

During that time, Lit checked the account book for the measly amount of medicine sold today.

Both of us ended our tasks in no time.

“We’ll take tomorrow off. I doubt anybody would come by.”

“It’s a storm, after all, I don’t believe anybody would be walking about outside at a time like this.”

“Yeah.”

The winds intensified and the house creaked under the wind.

But a house built by the premier carpenter downtown, Gonz, would not yield even in a storm.

We leisurely welcomed the coming storm.

[Don don!] Suddenly, there was a loud knock on the door.

“Why on a day like this?”

“Red-kun! It’s me! Newman!”

“Doctor Newman!?”

I opened the door and there stood Newman in a cloak. And also,

“Al!?”

Newman was carrying on his back a limp Al with blood flowing from his head. Al was soaking wet and he wasn’t even wearing shoes. His feet were dirty with mud and were pale due to the cold.

“Lit! Blanket and towels!”

“All right!”

Lit had already taken action when I called out to her.

Such a reliable worker.

We laid Al on a blanket placed on the store floor.

Lit had already prepared heated water using Spirit Magic.

I wrapped Al’s cold body due to the rain and loss of blood with a blanket to warm him up.

During that time, Newman got an antidote and hemostatic medicine from the medicine shelf and administered first aid.

“It’s deeper than expected...”

Muttered Newman.

The gash on the side of Al’s head was bleeding profusely.

“That’s bad.”

I looked from the side and found that the wound was extremely deep.

Regular treatment would not make it in time.

“Please wait a moment.”

I ran to the storage and decisively grabbed five Cure Potions.

They were magic potions with the Cure spell contained within them. Even if it was a wound that could not be treated in time with regular means, it could be cured by using magic.

(They might be luxury items for ordinary people but these are copies after all.)

They were Cure Potions duplicated using the Multiplying Potion. They weren’t something I bought so I used it freely.

◇ ◇ ◇

After investing five Cure Potions one after the other, Al’s condition stabilized.

“We made it, that’s great.”

I felt relieved.

Even if I possessed the Cure Potions, it would not be able to revive a dead person.

“That was shocking, I didn’t think you would actually use Cure Potions... However, this is hard to say but I don’t think Al-kun’s family can afford to pay the expenses for five Cure Potions...”

“I know. But, this child is a friend.”

“Friend huh.”

“So, please keep the fact that I used Cure Potions here a secret. Inform others that we treated him normally.”

“Understood. Red-kun, you’re a good guy.”

Newman said that with a smile.

“Leaving that aside, what happened?”

“I don’t know. I was just returning from a call from an idiot who fell down when he was fixing a leak in his roof in this weather when I found this child on the ground. It was obvious that he was injured but Red-kun’s Apothecary was nearer than my clinic so I came barging over even though I felt bad. Sorry for bothering you.”

“No, I should be thanking you for helping my friend. If Doctor didn’t pass by, Al probably would have died.”

Al’s body temperature had returned to normal and he had a restful expression.

“There were countless small fragments of rocks stuck inside his wound. I believe he was probably hit in the head by a rock or something similar that was blown by the wind.”

“I see, but why was he out walking today out of all days and was even headed downtown. Furthermore, he doesn’t have a rain-repellant outer cloak on and is in just his house wear. He isn’t even wearing shoes.”

“I have no idea.”

“...There’s no other choice other than to wake him.”

It wasn’t recommended to wake Al given that he had lost so much stamina but I had a feeling that something serious had happened.

I lightly shook Al’s shoulder and called his name.

“Hn...”

After rocking him back and forth a few times, Al slowly woke up.

“Are you all right?”

“Red-san...”

Al’s eyes swam with relief but the next moment.

“Ah, ahhhhh!”

“What’s wrong!?”

Al’s eyes were wide open with fear and he screamed while gripping my arm.

“It’s okay, I am here. Calm down.”

“He-help!”

“It’s all right now, this is my shop. Nobody will harm you here.”

“No!”

Al shouted.

“Home, Ademi came, mom and dad, attacked, holding an axe!”

That memory caused the recently recovered Al to have difficulty breathing due to the fear. Newman quickly tried to calm him.

Ademi, that kid they fought with previously?

And an axe?

I have to hurry.

“Here.”

I heard Lit’s voice from behind when I stood up.

Turning back, I saw an outer cloak and a bag with two Extra Cure Potions already prepared for me.

“The outer cloak is mine. It is a Shield Cloak with environmental tolerance.”

“Thank you.”

I quickly wore the cloak, wore my shoes and ran to Al’s home in the storm.



I’ll start with the conclusion.

Al’s parents were fine. But they were injured.

By the time I reached Al’s home at South March, the entrance to his house was wide open and the rain was being blown into the house.

I passed through the puddles formed at the entrance. The house had a simple structure with just a kitchen and bedroom so I could survey the entire house with a glance.

Al's parents had collapsed in the bedroom. They were bleeding but the wounds were not slash wounds but more like blunt force trauma.

It seemed like Ademi used the blunt end of the axe instead of the axe blade.

Both of them were bleeding profusely but the wounds were not deep. To the extent that the Extra Cure Potions Lit prepared were not required.

They would be fine once their wounds were washed, their bleeding staunched, given analgesic to ingest and had the broken bones fixed in place.

Newman also arrived a step behind and confirmed that there was no immediate threat to their lives.

We avoided the worst outcome.

However, this incident still had a major root of evil missing.

Let's move time forward a little.

Ademi was actually the son of the Guard Captain living in the Congress Street.

After the incident, Ademi went missing. However, beginning from the Half-elves, the Half-humans in South Marsh protested that Ademi was being sheltered by the guards.

But, the guards did not give a response.

There was no telling when the smoldering embers would ignite.

Even though the storm had passed through Zoltan, anxiety could be seen on the resident's faces.

Chapter 29

Weapon Master Al

“Al, what do you want for breakfast?”

“...I’m fine with anything.”

“Cheese Toast, Egg Toast, Fried White Fish, Bacon Salad, Pickled Cabbage...”

I continued listing breakfast candidates as I looked at Al’s expression.

“Scrambled Eggs.”

Al’s face showed a slight twitch of reaction.

“I see, scrambled egg it is. The beans boiled in tomato that Tanta’s family shared with us would go well as the side dish and also chicken soup.”

“Okay.”

His expression was rigid but I could see a little glimmer of expectation he had for the dishes.

I smiled and asked Al to wait in the living room as I head to the kitchen.

I was asked to take care of Al for a short while.

Al’s parents had become the centerpiece for the South Marsh resident’s protest.

For that reason, they were now recuperating in the mansion of the boss of the Half-humans in South Marsh, Big Hawk. Even their treatment was not by Newman from downtown but by a doctor from South Marsh.

“I can understand what they are saying and the indignation they feel. I was injured to that extent after all. However, I do not want my son to be surrounded by a place filled with hatred.”

Al’s father said that to me as he knelt on the ground. The pouch filled with 47 Quarter Peryl silver coins was probably all the money he had saved up.

Lit and I asked him to raise his head and agreed to take care of Al for a while.

“Morning!”

Lit woke up late as usual.

She waved energetically but Al didn’t say a word and only lowered his head slightly.

It was better than the very first day.

At first, we couldn’t even communicate with him properly.

His parents were attacked in front of his eyes and he abandoned his parents and ran away. Furthermore, the South Marsh residents were badmouthing the Zoltan residents even though everyone lived in the same area.

To a child like Al, that was enough trauma to cause him to close his heart.

“All right, it’s done.”

The scrambled eggs placed on the table sparkled as the morning sun shined on them through the window. The goodness of an egg first comes from appealing to the eyes. I guess that saying was not an exaggeration.

“Well then, thank you for the meal.”

With Lit seated beside me and Al directly opposite me, we started eating together.

“Lit-san, here I come.”

In the yard, Al faced Lit as they both held blunted shotels for training use.

“Sure, come at me from wherever.”

Lit did not equip two shotels as usual but just one in her right hand. Her left hand was placed on her waist and she raised her right hand above her head in an upper stance.

“When facing a stronger opponent with an upper stance?”

“Middle stance, counterclockwise.”

Al held the shotel in his right hand in a middle stance and slowly moved toward his left, or Lit’s right. Doing so will cause the opponent to restrict their own vision with their right hand.

Perhaps he saw a chance for victory or he succumbed to Lit’s sword pressure, Al dashed forward and aimed a slash at Lit’s right hand.

However, Lit’s sword struck Al’s shoulder with greater speed.

“Tss!?”

Lit was no longer at the place Al swung at. Lit’s sword perfectly stopped a skin width away from Al’s shoulder and she could have easily crushed his shoulder if she wanted to.

“One more time please!”

Al shouted and Lit nodded with a smile.

I watched the two of them cross swords as I planted new medicinal grass seedlings and seeds in the garden.

I was surprised when the brooding Al asked Lit to teach him the way of the sword.

At first, Lit refused, saying that she did not have beautiful sword techniques to teach others but after seeing Al's serious look, she agreed to teach him if it was only for the basics.

The weapon Al chose as Weapon Master was the shotel.

The same weapon used by Lit, a unique dual-bladed single-handed sword with an inward curve.

The sword was capable of cutting past the opponent's defense and it could be used as a regular curved sword by holding it in the opposite orientation.

In a sense, it was a weapon meant for humans or other similarly armed opponents.

Due to its shape, there was a knack for handling it so even I had no confidence in using it.

It was a sword loved and used by swordsmen with backgrounds like Lit who flourished in arenas.

A Weapon Master could become a master in whatever weapon he chooses. In that sense, it might be a better choice to choose a weapon like a shotel compared to easy to use weapons like spears or clubs.

Although there was still a scar in his heart, Al occasionally flashed a smile whenever he was swinging a sword.

Perhaps that was the influence of the Divine Protection of the Weapon Master.

"Although the wound in his heart won't disappear, the day he returns to his former self seems to be closer."

In the end, Al never did hit Lit even once but no matter how many times his sword was deflected, he never once dropped his shotel.



After Al had fallen asleep.

Lit and I drank some coffee with an added dash of brandy.

“Thank you, thanks to Lit, Al has become a lot more cheerful.”

“Rather than me, it was the power of his Divine Protection. It looked like he couldn’t help but feel joy from seeing his weapon move the way he wanted.”



Lit could never imagine having such feelings for her own shotel. Of course, as her favorite weapon, she would have some feelings for it but she would never look at her shotel and smile.

“For now, I believe he is working his Divine Protection in a good direction. Although we need to take note of his actions as he is still unstable.”

“Yeah, I noticed too and am monitoring him.”

“Ha~ leaving that aside, I’ve never taught anybody before... I sure hope I don’t show some strange habit.”

Lit sighed and laughed bitterly.

“I think you’re doing great. Furthermore, in the end, it is the skill that matters.”

“That is true but Gaius always said that just knowing how to swing a sword is not enough. There is a philosophy behind the sword. And that philosophy is not taught through the Divine Protection. In the end, I have never once won against Gaius.”

The Captain of the Imperial Guard of the Principality of Logavia and Lit’s Mentor, Gaius, who was murdered by the Asura Demon [Shisandan].

By the time we were granted entry into the palace of the Principality of Logavia and had the chance to properly converse with him, he had already become an Asura Demon.

Gaius was the only person Lit, who did as she pleased at that time, respected.

“I wonder if I can convey to Al what Gaius taught me.”

I placed my hand on Lit’s cheek as she sounded worried.

“You can.”

“Really?”

“After all, you’re Lit.”

“What’s with that reasoning.”

Lit sniggered at my encouragement based on unfounded reasoning.

But I meant it. I knew Lit well.

In Lit’s sword and words resided the teachings of a great teacher.

That was why she would definitely be able to teach Al what Gaius taught her in an even better form.

“Thank you.”

Lit closed her eyes and wrapped both her hands on my right hand placed on her cheek.

Chapter 30

The downtown worries for the captured Tanta

Morning.

Just as I was preparing to open shop, the door was opened violently and the doorbell rang loudly.

“Re-Red!”

“Red-san!”

The Carpenter Gonz and Tanta’s mother Nao flew into the shop.

The Half-Elf pair were trembling with pale complexions.

“Gonz and Nao, what’s wrong?”

“Ta-Tanta was taken away by the guards!”

“What?”

Tanta was!?

“What should we do... our people went to the guard station but they won’t even let us see him.”

Even Nao with her nerves of steel was feeling uneasy knowing that her son was taken.

“Please calm down first, why was Tanta taken away?”

Summarizing the story I connected together through their shaky words and my

occasional questions, I found that the two of them did not see Tanta get taken in the first place.

Since morning, Tanta was helping Grandma Alma, a dwarf Half-human, or in other words, a Half-Dwarf, weed the garden at her house in Downtown.

About seven in the morning, the guards stormed into Alma's home. They pushed aside the surprised Alma and dragged Tanta, who was in the garden, away without saying any reason or seeking his consent.

The Mido couple Gonz and Nao heard the story from Alma.

"Did they actually not explain their reason?"

"Grandma Alma said that..."

"...I also wish to hear the story from Grandma Alma."

"Bu-but, in that time, something might happen to Tanta...!"

In the first place, torturing a person is for the sake of getting them to confess something.

I don't believe Tanta has anything to hide and there shouldn't be a reason to torture him.

Nevertheless, I must do something as soon as possible.

At that moment, I heard footsteps behind me.

"I heard that Tanta was taken by the guards?"

"...Al."

His tone was calm but the look in the young man's eyes was extremely tough.

His training use Shotel was fastened to his waist.



A 'Closed' plate was hung on the shop door while Lit, Al and I walked in the streets of Downtown.

Rumors had spread like wildfire in Downtown.

All families were not doing any work at all as they worriedly talked about Tanta.

Alma was a rare Half-Dwarf in Zoltan.

Dwarves were a race that originated from the Dark Continent but a portion of them had migrated to the mountains of icy wilderness in the Northern area of the Avalon Continent and created a Kingdom to live in.

To the West of where we lived was a Dwarf city, constructed on Sir Beard Mountain (Knight Beard Mountain), governed by generations of Dwarf Earls, after a Dwarf saved a young Princess who was kidnapped by an Ash Dragon and received the Earl peerage and land as a reward from the King.

Alma was the daughter born from a female Peddler from Sir Beard Mountain who eloped with a Dwarf man.

Currently, she lives alone without any family but perhaps because her height similar to those of children endeared her to most Downtown children, there would always be some family's children at her house.

Alma always complained that they were too noisy but she always made baked sweets with a look that she was enjoying it and taught the children games like horseshoe toss.

"Ah, Red-chan! It's terrible!"

"Calm down, I'll go talk to the guards after this. For now, could you tell me what happened?"

Grandma Alma's small body was trembling as tears floated in her round black eyes.

"Tanta was taken away by the guards! Such a good child... even though I should have

protected him! I'm so ashamed of myself!"

I'll have to let Alma calm down first.

In that case,

"O Light Spirits who dispels the darkness of frenzy"

Lit cast a spell from behind me. It was a Spirit Magic meant for mental ailments like Confusion, Panic, and Berserk.

A ball that emanated faint light appeared and softly floated around Alma.

That was a Light Spirit.

"A-ah..."

After watching the light appear, Alma finally calmed down and started recounting the incident.



"I'm here to visit Tanta."

I said to the guard standing at the entrance to the guard military station.

"Who are you guys? Tanta? That Elf kid? He's under investigation today so come back tomorrow. Take that man sitting there as well and go back."

Turning to where he was pointing, I saw Tanta's father, the Carpenter Mido, sitting there with an indignant expression.

I took out a document from my shirt.

"This is an official request made through the Adventurers Guild. It is an investigation

request for the assault case in South Marsh. I heard from Alma that Tanta has been detained for that case. We have the right to be present in the Guard's investigation. I wish that we can settle the case together."

"What?"

The guard skeptically took the document from me to confirm it.

His half smile expression from the beginning immediately disappeared and subsequently paled when he saw the undersigned name.

"Party member Lit... the Hero Lit!? The requester is Executive Garadin from the Adventurers Guild!?"

Garadin was the tall adventurer who got into a dispute with Lit in front of my shop in the past.

He was from Downtown so he was acquainted with Alma.

Even if he currently lived in Congress Street, that man was still brought up in Downtown. Even though Zoltan was only made up of hopelessly lazy people, whenever their comrades were in danger, they would prioritize it over all other issues and would become a force to reckon.

After Garadin heard the story from Alma and Lit, he immediately prepared the documents and gave us the right to participate in Tanta's inquiry.

Although he might have an ulterior motive by including the Hero Lit, who can resolve any issue that shakes the town, inside the request.

However, he stopped me when we were leaving the Adventurers Guild.

"Please do not let Grandma Alma feel sad. I'll be relying on you."

I was convinced that there was no falsehood in those words.

The guard glanced at our faces.

He gave an amiable smile but neither of us showed a glimmer of a smile.

“I-I’ll call my superior over so please wait for a while!”

The entrance guard hurriedly dashed into the military station.

“This is a good town.”

Lit said. I also nodded.

“Yup.”

The whole Downtown was worried about a single Half-Elf child who lived in Downtown.

It was a good town.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Tanta!”

“Father!”

“Are you all right!? Did they do anything to you?”

“I’m fine!”

Mido ran to Tanta’s side and hugged him before he checked that Tanta was unhurt.

As expected, Tanta was not injured at all.

When we were brought over, he only had some signs of rope burn from having his hands tied.

I applied ointment on Tanta’s abrasion.

“Although I was shocked when I was suddenly arrested, I was not hurt in any way. Ademi’s father also apologized and said that he didn’t intend for this.”

Tanta was in a room in the military station.

The door was locked and the window was so small that a child would not be able to squeeze through it but it was an ordinary room with a chair, a table and a wooden jug with water in it.

“Ademi’s father asked me all kinds of questions to find out if I have any clue as to Ademi’s whereabouts. He’s also worried about Ademi.”

“As expected...!”

So it was an unfounded rumor that Ademi was being sheltered by the guards after all.

I’ll have to hear the side of the story from Ademi’s father, the Guard Captain, as well.

Chapter 31

Clinging to a fake god

“I’m sorry.”

Ademi’s father, Guard Captain Moen, started by apologizing to Mido.

“I ordered my subordinates to invite him in for questioning. I did not expect them to bind him with rope. And they did not report that his father requested to see him.”

Mido could not suppress his anger after seeing the abrasions on Tanta’s arms but apart from his look of anger at Moen who had lowered his head, he did not say any words of complaint.

On the other hand, Tanta was in a good mood after receiving a piece of fried bread from Moen as an apology.

“My subordinates suspect that the people in South Marsh killed Ademi.”

“That is reversing the victim and perpetrator.”

“Ademi used to come here until just a while ago. The Guards all cherished him. So for this incident, in the Guards’ minds, the victim and perpetrator are reversed.”

And so they treated Tanta, who was standing beside Al, roughly.

Moen apologized to us once again.

“But Ademi attacked my mother and father.”

Al, who had been keeping quiet all this time, said.

Moen had an unpleasant expression when he heard that.

“That’s right... but, the ones who saw that were only Al-kun and your parents.”

“What do you mean by that.”

“There are those who suspect if the person you saw was the real Ademi.”

“Oi!”

I inadvertently raised my voice.

Al’s cheeks were stained red with rage.

“Calm down. I am not asserting that you lied. Merely the fact that such possibility exists. There are just too many unexplainable points in this incident.”

That was certainly true.

First, even though the victims were attacked with an axe, they only suffered wounds from blunt attacks.

Both victims were repeatedly struck by the blunt end of the axe and suffered fractures but did not suffer from any life-threatening wounds. The bleeding was also due to the attacks that were aimed at places such as the forehead and nose which bleed easily.

Furthermore, Ademi fled the scene even though he had the chance to deal the fatal blow to both victims.

Second, why did he attack Al’s home?

Ademi certainly did hate Half-Elves like Tanta and Al.

However, even if that is the case, why would he go all the way from Congress Street to South Marsh located on the outskirts at the South just to assault Al’s parents and then disappear? Moreover on the day of the storm.

In addition, there was also unexplainable points for Ademi’s disappearance.

Even though Ademi came into contact with his Divine Protection at a young age, he was still a 10-and-a-half-year-old child.

Regardless of the lazy nature of the guards, they are not so inept to the extent that they are not capable of capturing a single child.

The other possibility was that Ademi immediately left Zoltan that night but that possibility was denied as the storm struck the next day as well. Unless he had magic or extremely unique skills, it was impossible to camp outside on that day.

Lastly, it was unexplained how Ademi got his hands on an axe and why he used an axe. From Al and the other's testimony, I gathered that the weapon Ademi used was a typical single-bladed battle axe. It could be used single-handed or double-handed and was a weapon loved by many adventurers but... the guards do not use them and typical households do not keep one at home for self-defense.

The Divine Protection of a Brawler was special, it didn't mean that they couldn't use axes but their fighting style revolved more around using the bottles and chairs at the scene and more importantly, Ademi had his own personal short sword and short spear. He had already hunted nearby monsters with them to raise his Divine Protection level.

Why would he not use his own weapon but an axe he obtained from somewhere?

With regard to Ademi's whereabouts that night, Ademi's mother testified that she thought he was studying in his room. Naturally, she was not keeping a watch on Ademi so it was possible for him to escape without her noticing.

Following that, other than when Al and the others saw Ademi when he attacked, he disappeared and there had not been any eyewitness reports of him since then.

The simplest solution to those questions would be that 'Al and his parents lied'.

Ademi snuck out from home due to some other matter and was abducted outside. With Al and his parents testifying with lies that Ademi attacked them with an axe, instead of having gone missing, it would seem that Ademi had fled instead.

It did kind of add up.

“Bullshit!”

Al screamed.

Moen pretty much explained what I had thought up in my head.

Naturally, he faced a backlash from Al.

“It is just nothing but assumptions. And that there are Guards who think that way. That is why the Guards treat the victims of this incidents as if they are the perpetrators. These circumstances probably led to the rough handling and rudeness this time around.”

The attitude of the Guards toward the victims of this incident was exceedingly bad.

But, being the cause of most public safety issues, the South Marsh residents who live in the slums would be hated if they said that the Guards were not maintaining public safety in the first place...

Furthermore, Campbell, Albert’s companion, and his other two members were born in South Marsh and murdered the Guards’ colleague so it further deepened their negative impression of the place.

By taking such attitudes, it generated friction with not only the South Marsh residents but even the Downtown common folks.

“I definitely saw Ademi! Holding an axe, he, my mother and father, again and again! He hit them with the axe countless times! And Ademi has been extremely violent ever since he experienced his Divine Protection! I know very well just how brutal Ademi is!”

Al shouted everything that he had been holding in until now.

Neither Lit nor I could say anything in front of that threatening attitude.

However,

“But, I also can’t believe that Ademi did something like that.”

“Tanta!?”

“Ah, eh, so-sorry! I-I’m not saying that Al lied!... But, it was about a week before Ademi disappeared. Ademi called out to stop me and I thought he was going to beat me up but he actually apologized to me. He apologized for beating me.”

Tanta was panicking because of Al’s pressurizing attitude but he explained himself desperately.

“Ademi was also worried. That he immediately resorted to violence due to the impulse from his Divine Protection. Hasn’t his dream always been to become a Guard? Didn’t he mention before that Guards do not use violence but instead crack down on it?”

“That...”

“When he apologized, he said that it was all right now, that he would no longer beat me up for no reason. It didn’t look like he was lying and it seemed as though he returned to the old Ademi. That’s why, when I heard he attacked Al’s parents, I-I was shocked...”

Tanta somehow managed to finish explaining and he hid behind me as if to escape from Al’s gaze.

“...‘It was all right now.’ What do you think he meant?”

“I don’t know.”

Lit and I were caught up on something from Tanta’s explanation.

Did he learn to control the impulses from his Divine Protection?

While the two of us were baffled, Moen interjected.

“In actual fact, I called Tanta-kun over because I wanted to ask him about the details regarding that. It is true that slightly before my son disappeared, he seemed a lot calmer. On top of that, I heard from Downtown adventurers that they saw Ademi and

Tanta-kun playing closely so I wanted to directly ask Tanta-kun for the details.”

“That day Ademi was in an extremely good mood and as an apology, he gave me a Wyvern Race game piece that he had an extra of.”

I guess it was the privilege of children to be able to forgive a person immediately after such a serious quarrel.

I could tell from Tanta’s tone that he did not feel any resentment or doubt toward Ademi.

“I see, a Wyvern Race game piece huh, that brings back memories. I also played it often when I was a child.”

Moen’s lips curled slightly.

As expected, Moen believes that his son was innocent.

That was in turn transmitted to the Guards which led to the current situation...

“Moen, what are your thoughts on the matter?”

I looked directed into Moen’s eyes and asked.

Moen initially endured my gaze but he soon shifted his eyes to the side and replied with a tired tone.

“I have tried to not let it show in my attitude but... in this circumstance, my subordinates have probably guessed how I feel inside. That is right, I also hate the inhabitants of South Marsh. They are a gathering of criminals... those are my true thoughts. Regardless of how I paraphrase it, for this incident, I do not believe that Ademi is the criminal and the South Marsh residents have either imprisoned him... or killed him. That is what I believe.”

Moen finished his piece and stood directly in front of Al.

Al, perhaps unconsciously, placed his left hand on the handle of the Shotel hanging on

his waist.

Just in case, I changed my posture to ensure I could move whenever necessary.

“I am truly sorry. At this moment, the Zoltan residents are at each other’s throats all because of the weakness of my heart.”

However, Moen bowed his head deeply to Al who was still a child.

”.....”

Al had a perplexed expression as he wordlessly stared at Moen who had lowered his head.



“Hero Lit. I heard that you have retired from adventuring. I do not know if you took the request purely to help Al-kun this time. However, I wish to tell you the information we have gathered. If you are able to aid us, we will also reward you.”

Lit showed a slightly troubled look when Moen said that to her but she replied with ‘I will at least listen to what you have to say’ and agreed to accept the information.

And so, Lit and I were seated on chairs in Moen’s room.

Al, Tanta and the others had returned home in advance.

I expected Al, being the concerned party, would object to it but perhaps he was still confused by Moen’s apology just now as he obediently agreed and returned to my shop.

“This might be a rude question but I wish to ask something.”

“Red-kun right? What would it be?”

“Has there been any evidence of Ademi using drugs?”

“!!”

Moen's complexion changed color.

“In other words, you think I am such trash that will allow my son to touch such things!”

“So you don't recall any such cases.”

“That's right!”

“But you of all people should be aware of it. The similarity of this incident to the one that was previously caused by Albert's companion, Campbell.”

The weapon used were axes that they were not familiar with. Violence without any reason.

And after that incident ended, all the perpetrators died while in this incident the perpetrator's whereabouts was unknown.

“But, even if my son was the criminal, my son has not killed anyone!”

“That is true, which is why we can still make it in time. Ademi is most probably the culprit. However, Ademi himself shouldn't be the cause of that violence.”

”.....”

“I hope that you will tell me everything you know about that analgesic drug.”

Moen showed a serious look.

He seemed to be contemplating for a while before he eventually opened his mouth.

“We still have not confirmed it. Because there isn't anybody in Zoltan with the ‘Appraisal’ skill. We are in the midst of requesting for individuals with Divine Protections such as Sages or Saints capable of ‘Appraisal’ from the Capital.”

“Appraisal huh... as expected, it had something to do with Divine Protections.”

“That's right, that analgesic drug, we call it a Fake God Drug, but it has a chance to

augment a person's Divine Protection."

I see, I don't know the details but that would probably alter the impulses from the Divine Protection. That was why Ademi told Tanta that he had been released from the impulses from the Divine Protection of the Brawler.

A reason to still use that Fake God Drug even though it has caused that many victims. That explained the sales pitch of becoming a new you.

In order to be released from the roles chosen for them by the Gods, the people were even resorting to dangerous drugs.

Chapter 32

The Hero obtains a flying ship

Hero Ruti drew her sword.

There was a gathering of eight monsters, four Titan Crabs, crabs as massive as elephants, and four Hierarch Sphinx with falcon heads.

The Hierarch Sphinx was probably the kin of the Andro-Sphinx with human heads that protected the entrance to that ruins.

“I wonder why are Sphinxes defending this ruins?”

Ares held doubts about the appearances of the Sphinxes fighting without fear of death.

Hierarch Sphinx may have low intelligence but Andro-Sphinx should at the minimum possess intelligence equal to humans.

What was the reason they protected this ruins which nobody came to for countless decades and centuries?

“No idea?”

Hero Ruti answered as if she was not interested.

That question was completely irrelevant to Ruti.

There were enemies in front of her and there was a sword in her hands.

In that case, there was no need to hesitate.

With her sword lowered to her side, Ruti directly charged into the monsters and slashed.

(I like to fight. Only during then does my Divine Protection and desire match.)

She dodged the claw the Titan Crab swung down on her with a leap.

The Hierarch Sphinx rushed at Ruti as she was in the air but she dispatched two of them with a single swing of her sword and sliced the forelimb of another off.

Upon landing, she thrust her sword up in a flash and pierced the belly of the Titan Crab that appeared above her head.

During that time, Tise had subjugated one of the Titan Crab and Theodora another.

“Chain Lightning!”

Ares charred the remaining enemies with a chain of lightning.

“Not enough power.”

Ruti said with an expressionless face as she, despite wearing armor, lightly leaped on top of the last remaining Titan Crab that was still breathing and thrust her sword deep into it.

The earth tremor as the Titan Crab collapsed.

The sand that had entered the ruins through the gaps were kicked up into a cloud of dust.

“Eh?”

Just as the dust cloud blocked his vision, Ares raised an idiotic sound.

The wide-open beak of the final remaining Hierarch Sphinx stabbed out from within the dust cloud.

“U-uwah!?”

He hurriedly tried to dodge but the physical ability granted by the Divine Protection of the Sage was too slow.

The Hierarch Sphinx’s beak was on the verge of tearing off Ares’ head when it suddenly came to a halt in front of his eyes.

“Ru-Ruti!”

Ruti had casually grabbed the back of the Hierarch Sphinx’s head with her left hand.

Despite having the stature of a lion and physical ability strengthening from its Divine Protection, the Hierarch Sphinx still could not break free from the young girl’s left hand.

Ruti wordlessly gathered her strength.

“Gyurururu!?”

The Hierarch Sphinx which weighed above a ton was raised into the air.

Its large body drew a perfect circle through the air.

There was a wet crunching sound as its head crashed into the ground.

Ruti had smashed the head of the Hierarch Sphinx into the ground.

Its blood formed a puddle and its body convulsed as if putting up a final resistance against death.

“Tha-thanks for saving me...”

“Ares. There was no need for area attacks. We only have four members now so we have to definitively take the enemies down one by one.”

“Eh, ah...”

“Furthermore, your positioning is bad. Onii-san always covered for you but neither I nor Theodora nor Tise will perform such actions. Protect your own body yourself.”

“So... sorry...”

Ares clenched his teeth.

Ruti’s words were right. Even though Gideon’s combat strength was weak, he had a wealth of knowledge in terms of how to cover for each other or thinking up formations and tactics, so he was great at covering for the rear guard.

He could use magic a lot easier when Gideon was around.

(Wrong, this is because Danan and Yarandorara pulled out! Things would have gone a lot better if they did not selfishly pull out of the party!)

Whenever he faced failure, Ares self-esteem as a Sage took a blow.

Why couldn’t it have gone better? I am a Sage, a wise person.

I have led the journey all this while. I should have been the one who did all the brain work.

Yet these people do not acknowledge me and keep singing praises for that burden, Gideon.

Just what did that guy achieve!

“That is all I have to say, let us proceed.”

Just as Ares was on the verge of spilling all his grudges out, Ruti indifferently said that, like she was not interested in what Ares was feeling, and walked off without turning back.

Ares was no longer in her eyes.



They proceeded through a passage covered with megalith walls engraved with images and letters.

“This is, without a doubt, a ruin from the era of the previous Demon Lord era.”

Ares commented after looking at the Dark Continent letters written on the walls.

“Ares-dono. We can already tell without you saying it at this late stage. Instead, think about what we can do in this situation.”

“...The Magma Slimes just now were the Lava Troops of the Demon Lord Army Four Heavenly Kings, Dreadna of the Fire, right?”

Capable of burrowing through the ruins by melting obstacles using their heat, the Magma Slimes squad was the pride of Dreadna of the Fire that gathered ancient armaments from all lands.

Their combat ability was strong as well and their ability to counter attacks by spitting viscous lava was troublesome too.

“Moreover, there were many with the Divine Protections of Fire Elementalist and Savage Fighter. Even we would be in danger if they attack us with numbers right?”

It would be better if they retreated as soon as possible.

The situation was getting worse the deeper they delved.

However,

“If we allow them to snatch the weapons of the previous Demon Lord, what would be the point of us coming here?”

Ares nodded along to Ruti's words.

"Theodora, be at ease. If worst comes to worst, we can escape using my Ice Magic. Magma Slimes are weak to Ice Magic."

Theodora wanted to say something but she seemed to have felt that it was meaningless as she lightly shook her head.

(They are opponents capable of lurking within the walls and we can't tell when they would open a hole and attack. Even though they are slimes, their intelligence is comparable to humans. Nor do we know their numbers. If they just relied on wave tactics as they hid in the walls, we would quickly run out of magical power.)

But even if Theodora or Ares dies, the Hero would probably survive.

Her strength was growing ever stronger. Even as a Spear-user and Magic-user expert, Theodora could no longer comprehend her heights.

(Everything might just work out fine as long as the Hero survives.)

Theodora flashed a rare wry smile as she had that thought.

"Maybe I should have gone to search for Gideon too."

If it was him, he probably could have pieced together the best solution even for this situation.

Apart from combat, he was a man vastly different from her talentless self, a man with a broad field of view.

At this late hour, she regretted not requesting for his teaching on what to do when she started feeling that she might be a burden.

Theodora nostalgically thought of Gideon's face that she had not seen for a long time.



Haunt Demon.

Protecting the depths of the ruin was an eerie demon that had the appearance of a goat skeleton with a thin layer of skin stretched across its body.

It was a type of elite demon and it threatened them with the crooked trident in its hand as acidic drool dripped from its open maw.

“To think that we would have to face a Haunt Demon...!”

Ares was speechless at the existence of the elite demon.

Most elite demons possessed magic invalidating abilities and in the case of the Haunt Demon, an approximate 50% of spells would be invalidated.

That ability might be a threat to individuals like Ares who relied on magic to fight, but it was fatal to magicians who wanted to enslave it, as no matter how meticulous they were and how perfect the control spell, in one out of every two cases, it would resist the control and snap the neck of the magician.

Therefore, they were named the Haunt (Fear) Demon.

Both Theodora and Tise showed tense expressions facing such a formidable foe but... only Ruti was thinking about something else.

“Why is a Haunt Demon here? I heard that demons were on the Demon Lord army’s side but it seemed as though it is surrounded by dead Magma Slimes?”

The question that came there was the exact opposite from that regarding the Hierarch Sphinx.

Ruti had no interest whatsoever as to who the kin of the Hierarch Sphinx was but she was brimming with interest for the meaning behind the existence of that Haunt Demon.

Demon Lord Army = Demon.

Even if you perused through just a few documents on successive Demon Lords, that was the only portion that was consistent regardless of the document.

“Does the current Demon Lord Taraxon have different ideology and doctrine of force compared to the previous Demon Lord? But the books described the demons as a race with no diversity.”

Apart from the Asura Demon, demons were living beings and naturally possessed Divine Protection as well.

However, demons were born with a single unique Divine Protection for the entire species.

For example, the Haunt Demon in front of their eyes, and every other Haunt Demon, would possess the Divine Protection of the Haunt Demon. There have not been sightings of demons with other Divine Protections such as Warrior or Magician.

Or rather, races that only have a single unique Divine Protection are called demons.

“In other words, demons share the role of their Divine Protection with their entire race. Onii-san speculated that the Gods did not intend for them to play the role of evil beings.”

Instead of answering, the Haunt Demon struck the butt of its spear on the ground.

It was probably asking them to come at it.

“Interesting.”

The edge of Ruti’s mouth curled slightly as she smiled.

The discussion topic that she exchanged with her brother through many long nights. What was the Demon Lord army? The true identity of the existence that they sought to defeat.

What would Onii say if he was here... just imagining that relaxed her heart.



“I told you!”

Theodora shouted.

The barrier Theodora put up held the assault from the Magma Slimes but it was just a matter of time before it was broken.

After they defeated the Haunt Demon, as if having calculated the timing, Dreadna of Fire and his Magma Slime troop attacked them.

The barrier set up by the Haunt Demon disappeared as well and Magma Slimes appeared one after the other from within the walls. They were probably aiming for this opportunity.

Ruti and party had retreated to the door that the Haunt Demon was guarding and they were under siege.

Apart from Ruti, all the members were exhausted from the battle with the Haunt Demon.

Ares would be out once he used a couple more spells while Theodora’s magic consumption was also intense.

“I’m back.”

“Tise! How was it!? Was there a weapon capable of decimating the Demon Lord army in front of us!?”

Their only hope laid with the weapon behind them. Ares shouted as he clung on to hope.

“There was a ship.”

“Sh-ship?”

“I have disarmed the traps along the passageway, follow me.”

Tise said before she once again returned to the passageway.

There was no other option.

The heroes trailed after Tise.



A crack split through the desert and an enormous shadow flew into the air.

It looked like a sailboat without any sails but countless propellers rotated as the enormous hull floated in the sky.

The desert sand that had accumulated on the ship for a long time was blown off and they sparkled as they drifted to the ground.

“Wh-what the hell is this!?”

“A flying ship.”

Tise, without any expression, piloted the flying ship using the control stick.

However, she trembled with tension and anxiety in the face of the lump of equipment that she was moving for the first time.

There weren't many but the Magma Slime troop was chasing them from behind.

She could see that many wooden parts formed the ship's hull. Flames would quickly spread if they were attacked with fire... Tise thought to herself.

We have to escape as soon as possible!

“Flying ship!? Tise, why are you capable of controlling the secret weapon of the previous Demon Lord that even I have no knowledge of... don't tell me you are related to the previous Demon Lord Army.”

“Ares, now is not the time for that. Tise, you can focus on flying. If we get chased by drakes, I will do something about it.”

“Understood, Hero-sama.”

Ruti headed toward the deck.

Looking down below the deck, she saw that they had already broken through the Blood Sand Desert that they had struggled to walk through and they were already close to the desert resident’s settlements.

“This has amazing speed, Hero-dono.”

Theodora who was standing behind Ruti exclaimed with admiration.

“Yeah.”

“This isn’t even full throttle so the previous Demon Lord’s weapon is really amazing. With this, we can go anywhere we wish in the world... is there anywhere Hero-dono wishes to go?”

“I cannot go there. Not as long as I am the Hero.”

Ruti said as she stared at the rotating propeller above her head.

“These wings are too much for me.”

A Flying Ship.

Wings to freely fly around the world.

While almost all the members were captivated by those wings, only Ruti laughed at herself with a dampened heart.

Chapter 33

Al obtains an excellent sword

“It will be difficult but do your best.”

“Thank you very much.”

Al bowed toward the customer as he left.

Currently, Al was seated at the counter for Red’s shop to tend to the store.

During this week, many times neither Red and Lit were around the shop.

Normally, either one of them would stay behind in the shop but today, Al tended to the shop instead of the two of them.

As Al did not have much knowledge in medicine, if there were any questions on which medication would be best, he could only write down the symptoms and promise that Red would deliver it to them when he returned.

The number of customers was not very high and they did not come steadily.

But contrary to Al’s assumption, there were a lot more frequent customers than expected so Al had a hard time trying to look for the medicines.

“One bottle of white berry paste please.”

“O-okay!”

While there were some who pointed at the medicine they wanted on the display shelf, there were also some who directly mentioned the name of the medicine.

Although there were clear labels on the shelf for each of the medicine, it was intimidating to look for them while the customer waited for him.

“Hmm, ah here it is, white berry paste.”

He exhaled as he finally found it.

Al handed the product over with a smile, feeling relieved that he handed it over safely.

“It will be 2 Peryl!”

The magician-like man placed eight pieces of Quarter Peryl silver coins on the counter.

“Did the Guards treat you badly?”

“Eh?”

The man who placed the silver coin murmured.

The man had a small stature and wore magician-like clothes stained with smudges. He carried a thin and long cloth bag over his shoulder. Al recalled that he met that man in South Marsh before.

“It’s because the Guards hate us South Marsh residents. They don’t seem like they are trying to catch the criminal. More importantly, Al, they would probably try to arrest you by using the excuse that you lied.”

In Al’s mind, he could see the scene of Tanta getting arrested a week ago.

Although, at that time, the Guard Captain Moen apologized...

“If anything happens, look for help from Big Hawk-san. That man is ruthless toward his enemies but kind to fellow South Marsh residents. Your parents are also at Big Hawk’s place right now.”

“...But father told me to stay here.”

“I understand your father’s feelings. The Guards are always aiming to make Big Hawk-

san and us pay for it. It might be a safer choice to stay away.”

The man leaned forward and grabbed Al’s shoulder.

Al unconsciously tensed his body.

“But that is wrong. Al, you are being targeted by the Guards. They are monitoring this shop.”

“Monitoring? That’s impossible...”

“Why do you stick to that belief when you don’t know anything for sure? Don’t you know that to the Guards, the easiest solution would be that you, Al, had lied?”

”.....”

The man squeezed Al’s shoulder.

A tinge of pain ran through his shoulder.

“Oop, sorry. I did not mean to scare you. I am only worried about you.”

The man smiled with a crooked grin.

He stroked Al’s shoulder to reassure him and pulled his hand away.

“Well, just know that Big Hawk-san is worried about you. If you sense danger to your life... or well, if you get sick of doing nothing, come over to the mansion. You know the place right?”

“I am a resident of South Marsh after all.”

It was a mansion that stood out-of-place, towering over the rows of dilapidated houses in South Marsh.

All South Marsh residents knew Big Hawk, the number two in the Thieves Guild who served as the boss of the South Marsh district.

Everyone who lived in South Marsh had their meager earnings deducted and collected by Big Hawk. In exchange, he managed the self-policing of the South Marsh district that has a bad public order which even the Guards hated... or that was the pretense.

To be honest, Al did not have a good impression of that person.

“Try telling the mansion guard that you are Al. We will entertain you with kisses to the forehead and warm soups in the mansion.”

“Th-thank you very much.”

The door chime rang.

It was a nurse from Newman’s clinic. She probably came to purchase medicine.

“Oop, I can’t obstruct business. Sorry for taking your time. See you. We’ll be waiting... ah, right.”

The man placed the bag he had on his back on the counter.

“You awakened your Divine Protection recently right? I heard from your father. Weapon Master. That’s a big deal. This is just between us, but regardless of age, when your Divine Protection awakens, it shows that the Gods have recognized that you have grown past being a child who did whatever you wanted to an adult who can fulfill the role they give you. That is our custom.”

“An adult?”

“This is the farewell gift for that. For the Weapon Master rising star we hold our expectations for. If you grew up in South Marsh, then use that strength for the sake of South Marsh. In that way, we can survive through these miserable circumstances.”

Upon opening the bag, there was a single shotel inside.

“Th-this is!?”

Al unsheathed the blade slightly from the sheath and unconsciously raised his voice when he saw the radiance.

“A sharp sword made with Crimson Steel and enchanted with strengthening magic. We acquired it from a merchant from the blade town known as Igosu Island.”

“I can’t accept something this valuable!”

The price was probably beyond 3000 Peryl.

It was a kind of excellent sword that only C-rank adventurers who struggled through difficulties could get their hands on.

“It’s fine. It is our blessings toward the future Weapon Master. To the God that bestowed upon you your Divine Protection.”

Before Al could return the weapon, the man smiled with a crooked grin and quickly left the shop.

After the man left, the nurse that worked at Newman’s clinic came over to the counter with a worried look.

“Are you all right? Did you know that man?”

“...It seemed that he lived in the same town as I did.”

Al could only manage to explain it that way.



After a while, Red returned.

“Welcome back, Red-san.”

“Oo, I’m back.”

“Where’s Lit-san?”

“I guess she won’t be returning for a while.”

Al showed a disappointed expression when he heard that.

The sword teachings from Lit during the evening was something Al looked forward to more than anything at this moment.

“You won’t be able to train with Lit today huh... I see, all right, I’ll be your opponent today.”

“Red-san will?”

“I can’t use a shotel so I won’t be able to teach you the way to use the sword but... it might be good to experience fighting against other kinds of weapons.”

“O-okay.”

Still, Al certainly made light of Red in his heart.

After all, his regular training opponent was the Hero Lit.

He somewhat understood that Red was a sword-user that did not fit within the D-rank bracket but there was still a large disparity when compared to the Hero.

(Moreover, Red-san can’t use a shotel.)

He still wore a copper sword on his waist.

It was a cheap article that a fastidious person would never choose.

The price was probably around 5 Peryl.

It was something that could not be compared against the excellent shotel that cost over 3000 Peryl which he received today.

Without noticing, Al was caught up in such thoughts.

After moving to the backyard, Red picked up the broom that was propped up against the wall.

“Very well, this will do.”

“Eh?”

Red had a single broom in his hand.

He didn’t even pick up a wooden sword.

“What’s wrong?”

“N-no, well, weapon?”

“Your weapon is on your waist.”

“Not that! Red’s weapon!”

Red grinned.

“A single broom is more than enough.”

Blood immediately rose to Al’s head.

Even he could not understand why he was so infuriated. However, he understood further in the future that it was because of the impulse from his Divine Protection.

He was a Weapon Master that used a shotel. He believed that it was the strongest weapon.

Despite that, his opponent had nothing but a broom as a weapon and felt that it was enough.

How could he forgive that? He was making light of the shotel!

The Weapon Master Divine Protection whispered that to Al.

Without waiting for the signal to start, Al drew his sword as he sprinted.

Even though it was a dull-bladed shotel made with soft metal for training purposes, it was still a lump of metal. There would be injuries if he attacked using all his might.

However, at that time, Al was lured by the desire to swing his shotel with all his strength without any hesitation.

“Eh?”

Al, who should have been sprinting toward Red, suddenly realized that he was staring up into the sky dyed red by the sunset.

It seemed that he had somehow fallen to the ground without knowing.

Al looked up at Red in confusion. The surprise blew away the impulses from his Divine Protection.

“A Weapon Master is strong against fear and confusion but is weak against the feeling of anger. You must first discipline yourself.”

“Eh, ah, eh?”

“I swept your leg as you charged straight at me without any thought.”

He didn’t see anything.

Even after listening to his explanation, Al still could not imagine how he was knocked down.

“A broom is certainly a third-rate substitute item as a weapon. However, it has a longer reach compared to a shotel. If you rush in without any strategy, it is natural that the broom would reach you first.

Al leaped up.

“Hoh.”

Red laughed happily.

The anger from before was no longer displayed on Al’s face. It had been replaced by the burning passion in his heart and the cold headedness of honed steel as he pointed his sword at Red.

“Very good, a person with a frame of mind like that will make progress.”

Red readied his broom to face Al who was steadily pointing his sword at him without rushing.



“Sword Art! Sword Wave!”

Al shouted as he swung his sword and shockwaves in the form of blades surged out.

“Oh wow, you’ve already acquired martial arts huh?”

Red lightly swung his broom and easily repelled Al’s sword wave, causing it to disappear.

“Here.”

Al thought he had plenty of space between them but by using the gap he showed when releasing the sword wave, Red immediately closed in and the tip of the broom was thrust in front of his eyes. He could no longer count the number of times that had happened.

“I concede.”

“Try to refrain from taking any more martial art skills. Martial arts may be flashy but

you should focus on your fundamental ability first. A means to attack remotely might be valuable to a Weapon Master that can't use a bow or anything else but right now, prioritizing the technique to safely close in and fight has greater merit."

"Yes..."

He finally could not resist from using a martial art as he couldn't find a way to close the distance to Red but even that was easily defended against.

"Very good, let's end it here for today."

"Erm..."

"What is it? Do you have a question?"

"Why are you still a D-rank adventurer even though you are so strong?"

Lit's strength left people astonished but Red's strength was unfathomable.

Al may be a complete novice, but after squaring off against Red, he understood that Red was a transcendent fighter comparable to Lit.

"Hmm. I just feel that there is no need to aim for power and authority just because a person is strong."

"Eh?"

"I am having fun now. Running a shop together with Lit, occasionally teaching kids like Al the basics, giving a hand to those in need around me... I am enjoying a life like that."

"Bu-but, isn't it better to live your life... getting the respect of many, fulfilling your Divine Protection role, leaving your name in a major part of history, becoming a great hero!?"

Red laughed as he found it amusing.

"Just a while back, you were uneasy with your Divine Protection and said that you would have preferred the Divine Protection of the Warrior instead but it looks like you

have already completely adapted to your Divine Protection.”

“Eh, ah... I guess you’re right.”

Al was astounded by the changes in his own thinking.

Without realizing, Al was now striving to become a hero.

“It’s fine, that is also living. To live by the sword and make a name, to die by the sword and leave your name behind. That is not that bad too.”

”.....”

“But, I am different. That is all there is to it.”

“I think I am, currently, indebted to that man... Big Hawk. I received a sword from that man.”

“A sword?”

“It is a valuable fine sword and with it, I can become a hero like Lit-san. That is what I am thinking... but whether it is something I actually want myself, or it is something my Divine Protection wants... I do not know.”

“Even I can’t grasp the inner workings of a person’s heart. However, yes... if you are troubled, try listening to your sword.”

“Listening to my sword?”

“Whether it wishes to cut many opponents or whether it will only cut to protect the ones you hold dear... that was something I heard in the past from an acquaintance skilled with the spear.”

“...I see, thank you very much!”

“Sure. Now then, it’s about time for dinner.”

“Yes!”

Staring at his training sword, Al nodded strongly.



The blade mirrors the heart.

Through the blade, one can speak with their heart.

The Crusader, Theodora, assistant instructor in spear arts for the Cathedral Knights, taught them to do so when they were troubled by the impulses from their Divine Protection.

In the ascetic lifestyle of the Cathedral Knights, there were many who were in conflict with the impulses of their respective Divine Protections.

The Half-Elf Yarandorara and I were surprised when Theodora, with her model warrior expressionless face, started laughing after she recalled her struggles when teaching a young girl with the Divine Protection of the Wild Child.

I could clearly remember the joyous look on Theodora's face when she said that even though she caused her a lot of hardship, the girl became a Cathedral Knight that she could be proud of.

Nevertheless,

"A sword as a present huh..."

I should investigate that sword later.

Chapter 34

Together forever

I drank apple cider in the living room as I waited for Lit to return home.

“I’m home~”

“Welcome back, many thanks for working until so late.”

“Phew~ I’m exhausted.”

Lit tottered to the chair beside me... or not, as she hugged me and sat on my knees.

“Ooh?”

“Ha~ I’m back to life.”

“You sound like you just entered a hot spring.”

“Ooo a hot spring sounds nice. We talked about making one but I totally forgot about it.”

“I’ll talk to Gonz once we finish our investigation.”

“I wonder how many should we have?”

Lit placed her chin on my shoulder and relaxed her body.

“Oh right, there’s something I want you to see.”

“What is it?”

“Al received a shotel from a lackey of Big Hawk. I investigated it a little but I wanted Lit to have a look at it too.”

“All right, I still have enough strength to cast Detect Magic.”

“Nn, it’s placed below that table.”

Lit released her hands from my neck but stretched toward the cloth bag without moving from my knees.

Once she took the sword out from the bag, she chanted the Detect Magic spell.

Detect Magic.

Belonging to the Law Art or Spiritual Technique system rather than the Magic system, it was a spell capable of visualizing magical power and was only available as a martial art to certain front-line Divine Protections.

Its basic use was to see through the strengthening magic used by an opponent or the effects of their equipped magical tools.

Other practical use would include seeing through magical traps or appraising magical tools like what we were doing.

Of course, I could not use it.

“Double-edged shotel. The blade is made of Crimson Steel. The handle is made of Ebony. The pommel is larger than the sword guard. Made by a swordsmith from Igosu Island. The quality is not bad. It can be considered to be an excellent item for C-rank adventurers.”

“What about magic?”

“Based around a simple strengthening magic. The sharpness and hardness of the blade have been strengthened. Additional magic has been applied to further amplify the strengthening. This would be the perfect first magic weapon for a C-rank adventurer, but.”

Lit stared at the precious stone affixed to the pommel of the shotel.

“There’s no mistaking it. This sword has the Locate spell cast on it.”

Locate was a spell that could indicate the location of the item it has been cast on no matter where it was.

The information obtained from the spell could not only purely be used to inform the user of the location, it could also be connected to a compass to indicate the direction or to a piece on a map such that anyone could tell the location.

“Even though I am able to use Spiritual Magic, my Divine Protection is a front-line type so I can’t dispel it.”

“I know. I reached the same conclusion.”

I, who investigated it from a knowledge standpoint, and Lit, who investigated its magical aura. If both our conclusions matched, it was most likely true.

“Locate huh. Considering it from a friendly standpoint, it’s so that they can come to his aid wherever Al is in danger.”

“You believe that?”

“Nope. Big Hawk is not such a ‘good guy’.”

Big Hawk rose up the ranks of the Thieves Guild through numerous ‘legends’, in which there were many brutal actions in Zoltan that stood out.

He made many enemies through those means so it was said that he rarely stepped out from his own territory, South Marsh.

“There is probably a reason why he wants to know Al’s location.”

That was most likely why he gave such an expensive magical weapon as a gift.

“A reason to know his location...”

I could think of a few.

“Ah, sorry to bother you with this even though you’re tired and just came home. Did you eat anything outside? I prepared sandwiches but if you didn’t eat anything I came whip up something proper.”

“I’m fine with just sandwiches.”

“Really?... I’m guessing you didn’t get to eat anything outside.”

“Yup, but I want to stay like this for now.”

Lit felt a little strange.

She seemed somewhat lonely or uneasy compared to her usual self...

“What’s wrong? Did something happen?”

“Will we be able to continue living like this forever?”

“Forever ?...”

I guess something happened after all?

Lit showed an anxious expression that I had never seen before.

“It will be forever. I will make sure it does.”

“Really?”

“Really, have I ever lied to Lit?”

“...You have!”

“Eh?”

“You told me there would be ruins on the left road! But it was on the right!”

Ah! That was when we were searching for ruins in Logavia!

“Ah, that was... or rather, who would actually listen to their competitor when we were competing on who would be the first to obtain Elven treasure!”

“You lied to me!”

Lit hugged me tight and repeatedly said that I lied to her.

I smiled wryly and gently hugged her back.



“All right all right, I certainly did lie to gain an advantage.”

“I knew it!”

“In other words, I won’t lie when I have nothing to gain from it.”

“What do you mean?”

“I wish to stay with Lit forever. I have no reason to lie and leave Lit. So I’m not lying.”

“...Mu, are you not ashamed to say that out loud.”

“Of course... it’s terribly embarrassing.”

Lit submissively kissed my neck lightly and reluctantly released me.

“I want to eat Red’s cooking after all.”

“Sure, then, I’ll quickly make something.”

“...Thank you. Um, I, also wish to stay with Red forever.”

“Then, we’ll be together forever.”

I looked at Lit’s expression once again before entering the kitchen but she still looked uneasy after all.

Chapter 35

Lit's anxiety and the lost arm

Two hours ago.

The South Marsh district at night.

“Ou-oucchhhh, please forgive me!”

The thug-like man screamed in pain as Lit twisted his arm.

“Sheesh, taking up so much of my time.”

“To be able to catch up to me in town even though I possess the Divine Protection of Roof Walker, you’re a monster!”

“I don’t care, hurry up, take out the item you are hiding.”

“Damn it!”

His arm creaked under the pressure.

Cold sweat was oozing from the man’s forehead.

If she put just a little more strength into it, his arm would break.

“Ah~ also, I won’t break your arm but rip it off, okay? Since you could just get it healed if I only break it.”

“Yo-you bitch!?”

The man came to a conclusion.

The girl would actually do whatever she said she would.

In the worst case, she would probably leave him half-dead and search for that item even if she had to strip him.

It was already the end when he got caught.

“A-All right.”

The man weakly passed her the medicine-filled bag he had inside his clothes.

“You guys go through three stages just to hand the drug to the drug dealers. You seriously made me work hard.”

The man was a person close to the mastermind who sold the Fake God Drugs.

That man handed the drugs to three other big shots from the underground society and those underground society big shots, in turn, pass the drugs to criminal organizations which in turn hand them to drug dealers and drug runners.

From there, the drug dealers and drug runners directly pass the drugs to the users.

A normal investigation would only reach the criminal organization stage. And even if they wanted to clamp down on those criminal organizations, those organizations had the underground society big shots behind them. It was impossible to subject them to violent interrogations.

The guards would probably not be able to reach the stage she was at.

“You guys are too cautious, to actually make me put in so much time and effort.”

After investigating for a number of days consecutively, Lit finally found a man who handed out drugs without buying them from anyone. That person was this man with the Divine Protection of Roof Walker.

If she could find out his background, she should be able to find the source of the drug.

”.....”

“Ara, you’re suddenly a lot quieter... what’s wrong?”

The man didn’t respond.

His mouth opened limply and drool fell to the ground.

“No way!?”

Even someone like the Hero Lit would have some gaps in her knowledge and planning.

However, she would never have expected that there would be a ‘Sacrificial Bomb’ planted in him which required the Advanced Alchemy skill in a place like Zoltan.

The man’s body disintegrated and the shockwave caused green liquids to scatter around the surroundings.

“Tch!?”

Despite quickly retreating, Lit could not avoid the liquid which hit her arms and legs.

“Sticky bomb!”

Sticky Bombs had a viscosity that of birdlime and were unique skills of those with the Divine Protection of the Alchemist.

As they had the skill to alter the performance of explosives, they could manufacture explosives through special formulation using Alchemy to scatter those sticky substances.

The sticky substances on Lit’s arms and legs could not be removed easily and her movements were restricted.

(I was careless!)

The man had a huge crater in his chest and had collapsed on the ground. He probably died instantly.

(Somebody is coming!)

Accompanied by the sound of something moving fast, three individuals with their faces covered by cloths appeared from the shadows of the buildings.

They were probably alerted by the explosion earlier. In order to erase witnesses.

Lit moved her two arms that were restricted by the sticky substances and tried to draw her shotel but,

(The Sticky Bomb just now hit my sheath!)

Unfortunately, the sticky substance struck her sword and had fixed her sword in its sheath. She could not draw her shotel even if she pulled hard.

“Shi...”

The three masked individuals rushed over.

She didn't have the time for Spirit Magic. Lit leaped to the side while her whole body was still covered by the sticky substance.

“Gua!?”

While leaping to one side, Lit extended her foot and sent one of the masked individual flying.

That person rolled on the ground and crashed into the wall of a poorly built house.

“...A regular person would have died though.”

The man who was kicked lightly shook his head and stood up.

“Divine Protection of the Assassin... I guess not.”

They seemed to move as though they had the Divine Protection of the Assassin but something felt wrong.

(Did they increase their Divine Protection using the Fake God Drug? But it doesn't seem as though they are wielding axes.)

Lit looked at her bleeding left arm.

During that clash just now, the opponent's blades skimmed across both her arms. It wasn't a serious injury at all but... it meant that the opponents were skilled enough to wound Lit.

(I would be able to somehow pull through if I was in perfect form but if only I could draw my sword.)

She could expel the sticky substance clinging to her body using Spirit Magic but she didn't think that her opponents would overlook that opportunity.

(These people should be about lower B-rank adventurer ability? Doesn't that mean they are stronger than Albert?)

If only she had a sword.

Lit was frustrated with her own carelessness.

(Not only that, if only my opponents used swords.)

The weapons of the masked individuals were claws. They were weapons worn on fists and had the form of three metal claws extending forward.

Those were difficult to snatch and even if she succeeded, they were weapons that Lit had never used before.

Lit took out the throwing knife she had in her clothes.

They were normally used as ranged weapons but she could only use them to fight at the moment.

The masked men's eyes thinned as they grinned having understood that they held the advantage.

At that moment, a large shadow jumped onto the head of the masked men.

“Uge!?”

The fist that slammed down crushed the masked man's skull.

The masked man died instantly and crumbled to the ground.

“Scoundrels trying to take advantage of a single girl.”

The man intimidated them by showing his blood-covered fist.

Lit unconsciously blinked to make sure she did not mistake the man in front of her.

I don't believe it, why is he here... those words screamed in Lit's heart.

“Danan...!”

“Yo, Lit. I didn't think I would be able to meet you again here. But we'll have to postpone our reunion until we're done with these guys.”

Both the now remaining two masked men stared at the large man wrapped in muscles with overflowing murderous intent.

“...Why did you!”

But, before they said another word, the masked men were pulverized instantly by Danan’s fists.

In the literal sense.

After it ended, there were only lumps that no longer resembled human forms remaining.



“O Water Spirit, cleanse my body.”

Lit gathered her magic and chanted, causing Water Spirits in the form of fish without scales to appear, which washed off the sticky substances clinging to Lit, the injury on her left arm as well as the dirt.

Her body was cleansed but her mind was still unsettled.

“Danan, why are you here?”

“I was just thinking the same for you but all right. It’s that. I told Hero-sama that I will go look for Gideon.”

Lit’s intense beating heart hurt. Of course, it was not a physical wound.

However, the cut wound she suffered just now could not even compare to the pain she was feeling now.

“Then, you plan to take Gideon and leave?”

“That was the plan but.”

Danan scratched the back of his head.

“I have not been in Zoltan for more than a week but I have a pretty good grasp of the situation... I never expected that Gideon to get together with Lit.”

Danan grinned broadly. But he immediately tightened his facial expressions.

“I did not find anything. I plan to return with that.”

“Eh?”

“Hasn’t Gideon found a place to return to? In that case, everything else doesn’t matter. I won’t go out of my way to take him away.”

“Really!?”

Danan nodded with his face full of scars.

“Actually, I didn’t even want Lit to see me. I was planning to quickly leave but... Tch, there were evil things happening here too.”

Danan said as he peeled off the mask of the masked man corpse.

“That is...!”

Lit was at a loss for words when she saw its appearance.

There were horns on the head of the corpse. Unlike the human-like appearance just moments ago, the head now was devoid of hair and had two twisted horns protruding out.

“Stalker Demon! A demon assassin! Why is a middle-rank demon in Zoltan!?”

“I have no idea. But this incident is a lot darker than expected.”

”...!”

“It’s getting dangerous so stay away... well, I want to tell you that but, to be honest, it’s tough on my own. I would be happy if the two of you helped but... it might not be a

good idea to show myself to Gideon. That guy has a strong sense of responsibility after all.”

“That’s right...”

“That’s why I want to exchange information with you, Lit. I’m staying in the Black Cat Pavilion in the South Marsh district.”

“Okay.”

After that, the two of them exchanged information on the current situation.

After collaborating their information, they found that the Roof Walker man was truly a person from the Thieves Guild, someone from Big Hawk’s faction.

“It’s a little cliched seeing how the mastermind is the Thieves Guild.”

“Isn’t that usually the case?”

“Yeah.”

Danan rubbed his bearded jaw as he pondered.

Lit considered the state of affairs for a while before deciding that there won’t be any further development so she returned.

“Well then, I’ll be heading back.”

“Sure, don’t let your guard down like before.”

“I will bear that in mind.”

Lit left without a sound.

Danan sensed Lit’s presence move further away and groaned emotionally.

“I knew that Gideon was here but to think that even Lit was here too. The world works in interesting ways.”

That being, that took Danan's form, started walking back to the inn.

"I only ate a single arm so the memories are incomplete. It would be foolish to appear before Gideon who knew Danan well. It would be great if I could stay hidden until they shatter the demons' schemes."

That being showed a completely different smile compared to that of Danan as he walked down the dark streets.



At the same time.

In a seaside village.

"Oo, he's awake!"

Danan opened his eyes.

It seemed as though he drifted ashore at some village.

He was struck by intense hunger and Danan spoke weakly.

"Fo- food please."

"Well, be patient, you should first have some plain hot water."

Danan downed the cup of plain hot water he was given instantly.

His stomach immediately convulsed and he was assaulted by the urge to vomit... but,

"Delicious!"

"Amazing, normally the stomach would not be able to take the first mouth."

The villagers were amazed at the appearance of Danan gulping down the plain hot

water.

“What an amazing person. Despite being unconscious for a whole week.”

“One week!?”

Danan stared at his right arm missing from below his elbow.

The humiliation from his negligence caused his face to turn purple.

“That bastardddd! I have no idea how you survived but the next time I meet you, I will murder you!”

That being should have been dead. He definitely saw Gideon cut its head off with his sword.

Asura Demon Shisandan.

The Demon Lord Army General that impersonated the Knight Captain Gaius of the Principality of Logavia and almost crushed the country from the shadows.

The one that assaulted Danan was without a doubt, that Shisandan.

“Even better, if you can revive without limit, at least let me kill you 10 times! It’s decided!”

Danan swore his revenge with his fist thrust into the air.

The villagers looked at each other and all wondered who that superhuman and weirdo was.

Chapter 36

Let's buy a sword in downtown

"Red-san, please get some anti-motion sickness medicine from the storeroom."

"Ah, thanks."

Al has completely learned how to run the shop.

There probably won't be any issue even if I let him take care of the shop alone.

I was surprised by a child's ability to learn.

"Also, Lit-san, stop flirting with Red-san all day and have some distance. It's about time to compound the gray starfish grass, if not, it would be too late."

"Eh~ but it has been busy lately so the time I could spend with Red has decreased."

Lit, who had her head on my not so soft knees, complained edgily but she still obediently moved away.

Lately, because Al would complain when it was time to stop putting off work, Lit would happily cling onto me until he complained.

"However, considering how you are helping me properly, I should pay you for your part-time work."

"It's all right. Since you've been letting me eat delicious meals every day."

"Even so."

"Then."

Lit interjected.

“Let’s go shop for a shotel for Al to use.”

“Eh? I-I’ll feel bad. Isn’t that even more expensive than the part-time pay? Moreover, I have the shotel that I received.”

Shotels were a rare form of weapon so it was slightly expensive.

A steel shotel would cost 60 Peryl.

A similar steel longsword would cost 30 Peryl so it was double the price.

That was the standard pricing for mass-produced products. It would become even more expensive if it was crafted by a famous swordsmith and the price would jump up to a few thousand Peryl if magic enchantment was included.

Swords were more expensive compared to other weapons.

That was because in order to forge steel, despite elementary, the smithing skill was necessary.

For swords where the entire blade has to be forged, skill points have to be poured into the Divine Protection to reach Level 5 at the minimum so there was a limited number of people who could produce them.

While we’re on that point, copper swords forged via casting do not require any skill so even if the material itself is more expensive than iron, it was traded at a cheap price of below 10 Peryl.

Although it can’t be made into large weapons like dual-handed swords and polearms due to the properties of the metal, copper swords were the allies of fledgling adventurers.

One Peryl was approximately the living expenses of a day for the common people.

In other words, a 60 Peryl shotel was two months worth of living expenses.

Taking into consideration that Al lived in the slums, the South Marsh district, it might even be about four months worth of his living expenses.

Al probably thought that it was way too much for a part-time pay for about half a

month's work.

"But Al. The shotel you received is not something you wish to use right?"

"A-about that."

Al faltered as I hit the bull's-eye.

"Well, it is natural. A user can adjust to the weapon once he gets used to it but in the beginning, you should use a weapon that matches your physique and habits."

"I also had a sword custom-made for myself when I just started."

Lit seemed to be lost in nostalgia reminiscing on the time she started learning the sword.

Even now I still remember the time I had my first custom-made copper sword made for me after consulting the old man in my village's casting workshop time and again.

Although copper swords were made through pouring molten copper into a cast, the shape could be freely altered because of that.

That meant that it would be suitable for beginners to the sword.

Whereas for iron casting, once it has been molded, it must go through the tempering stage using a hammer.

Just skill level 1 is sufficient for that but precisely because it requires the Blacksmithing skill that the number of people who can do it is limited.

Well, I intend to give Al a proper steel shotel as a present.

A Weapon Master will not likely be satisfied with a copper shotel after all.

"Since we have decided, let's go in the afternoon."

"Eh, we're going today!?"

"The smithy closes in the evening after all."

“Bu-but.”

“Of course, I will be tagging along. Oh, Red should be the person tagging along instead. I am more familiar with the shotel after all.”

“Even Lit-san.”

I approached Al’s side and stroked his head of curly hair.

“Children don’t need to hold back. In situations like these, you just have to cheerfully say a single word of thanks.”

“...Yes, thank you very much, Red-san, Lit-san!”

Al smiled like a child, with dimples on his cheeks.



In the Drake Armory at the outskirts of Downtown.

A self-proclaimed drake slayer. The shop belonged to the Dwarf Mogurim.

“Welcome.”

The receptionist was Mogurim’s wife, Mink. She was a female human. She was in her late 40s.

Appearance-wise she was a stout woman.

It painted a strange picture when she stood beside Mogurim with his short dwarf stature but they made people feel that they match for some reason.

Even in Downtown where many half-humans lived, a dwarf and human married couple were rare.

“Why isn’t it Red-chan, have you finally decided to graduate from the copper sword?”

“No, I wish to give Al here a sword as a present.”

“Ooo, will it be his first sword?”

“That’s right, that’s why I want to discuss a little with Mogurim though.”

“Ohh, that’s exciting! I’ll call my husband over now.”

Mink shouted “Dear~! Dear~!” as she ran toward the smithy beside the shop.

Al stood there with his mouth wide-open.

“I guess you have played around this area quite often but have never entered the shop.”

“Yes.”

“The people living in Downtown are all like that. A bunch of strange people.”

“What do you mean by strange!”

Came a shout with a gruff voice as a man with a small stature even in the standards of dwarves, roughly the same height as Al, squared his shoulders and walked over. Typical of a dwarf, he had a rich beard growing around his mouth.

“Do you have no self-awareness, Drake Slayer.”

“You bastard! Are you still doubting me! Very well, I shall make you listen to it once again, that battle where I slaughtered the Master of Lake Enka, the accursed Emperor of the Fog, the Mist Drake Fafnir!”

“Give me a break, I’m tired of hearing it. In the first place, I’ve never heard of a Mist Drake named Fafnir. Furthermore, you make Lake Enka sound like an unexplored region but it is quite a famous landmark for the fishing industry, you know? There is even a village there.”

“That’s right! That evil and cunning and violent Fafnir treated the villagers like slaves and demanded a young girl as a sacrifice every day! The villagers could barely keep their own lives and couldn’t even cry for help!”

Mogurim’s story changed every time.

It seemed it was true that he defeated some kind of monster at some lake.

But conversely speaking, it meant that everything else he said was just appropriate setting he made up.

“Give it a break!”

“Guaaa!?”

See, just as Mogurim was about to continue his story, Mink sent a kick to the back of his head.

There was a difference in physique after all so Mogurim grandly face-planted on the ground.

“The customers did not come to listen to your meaningless stories! They are here for that Al kid’s very first sword! Make sure to forge one that will earn their praise!”

“Ouchhh. Seriously, you didn’t have to kick me.”

“Just hurry up!”

“Yes yes.”

Mogurim stood up and dusted off the dirt in his beard.

“All right, it’s for that Elf boy right! Shotel huh, it’s quite a difficult order but there’s no need to worry! I have a mountain of weapons in my warehouse at the back so you can decide on what kind of balance you want there.”

“Ye-yes!”

“I’ll come along too. I am kind of familiar with the shotel.”

Mogurim blinked his eyes when Lit said that.

“Your luck sure is good to get the Hero Lit’s assistance in making your weapon.”

“I really think so too!”

Al replied happily.



The three of them moved to the back while I glanced at suitable weapons inside the shop.

Mogurim possessed the superior craftsman-type Divine Protection, Rune Blacksmith.

Normally, instead of a shop in Downtown, it wouldn't be strange for him to open a shop geared towards nobles or upper-ranked adventurers but it seemed that his personality had bad compatibility with his Divine Protection and he had difficulty affixing magical properties to his crafts.

But his ordinary blacksmithing was perfect so he was greatly respected as the best blacksmith in Downtown.

...See, now I have strayed off topic.

The door opened with a thud.

“Welcome.”

Mink called out from the counter.

“Oya, isn't it Red. Why are you slacking off at a place like this?”

“Oh, Gonz and Stothun and Doctor Newman? What an unusual trio.”

Three people I knew very well entered the shop.

The Half-Elf carpenter Gonz, the Half-Orc furniture shop owner Stormthunder and the Human doctor Newman.

“Doctor Newman and I were planning to come here together all along. I wanted to order carpentry tools. Doctor wanted a scalpel for medical use crafted.”

Gonz replied. Newman also nodded along.

“I previously requested for repairs for my canna and knife used to shave furniture. I unexpectedly ran into the two of them.”

Three individuals, three different looks.

Gonz with neat facial features. Stothun with his fearsome face. Newman with a bald head and gentle smile.

All of them talked about trivial Downtown matters as they chatted in the Dwarf smithy.

“This is Zoltan.”

“What are you talking about Red?”

“I’m saying to let me in on the conversation.”

“Ooo, well then, now that you are living a life of cohabitation, maybe you could tell us some fond moments with your loved one.”

“I’m interested in that too. Red-kun, how is it going at your place?”

The three of them looked at me with grins on their faces.

“Fine, I’ll tell you if you wish to know. But you all must be prepared. Once I talk about Lit, it might even cause the tools you guys have repaired to become rusty again.”

The three of them laughed at my lame joke and Stothun slapped my back.

“Sheesh, you’re one lucky guy.”

“But my wife is great too.”

“It would be great if I found a good woman too.”

“What about that girl at the clinic?”

“She has a proper boyfriend. Furthermore, he’s a C-rank adventurer.”

“Serious? Doctor won’t be able to win then.”

“That’s not for a D-rank adventurer like you to say.”

“I have Lit after all.”

After I proudly said that, the three of them looked at each other and nodded before they started whacking my head.

I quickly fled to the counter where Mink was at.

“Hah, what childish behavior.”

Mink was exasperated but she was smiling like she was enjoying it.

Chapter 37

A pity!

After the four of us chatted for some time, I heard angry shouts coming from outside the shop.

“Is there a fight happening?”

“Let’s go take a look.”

Gonz and Stothun who were brimming with curiosity strove to be the first to have a look.

Newman and I were left behind.

We looked at each other.

“Red-kun, I’m thinking of earning some medicine and treatment fee from injured fools.”

“Ah~ That’s a good idea. Let’s go earn some pocket change.”

We talked about what we would buy using the money we earned as we headed outside.

However, the noise outside didn’t originate from a fight.

It seemed to be an argument between a mother with two young children and a party of two men.

The mother and the two children were residents of Downtown but I had never seen the men before. They were probably people from South Marsh.

The children were clinging to their mother in fear. The mother wrapped her arms around the children to shield them and was snapping back at the men with a fierce

look.

“Give it a break! If you want to do it, you guys can do it yourselves!”

“Madam is annoyed with the Guards and Congress as well, right? The South Marsh district, the Downtown and the Harbor district. If we oppressed people do not stand united to protest, Zoltan will never change!”

“Stop it! You are frightening the children!”

As expected of a Downtown mother, she firmly replied to the two men despite their intimidating attitude.

“Oi Gonz, Stothun. What’s going on?”

“I don’t really know that much but it seems that those South Marsh men are soliciting a protest at the Guard Station on Congress Street.”

“Now that you mention it, I’ve heard people mention that they were gathering people these few days.”

“They’re planning to serve meals to those who participate so apparently quite a number of the poor from not only the South Marsh district but also Downtown and the Harbor district are gathering.”

I heard about that too.

Thanks to that, the Guards had to recall manpower to maintain vigilance toward protests and the Ademi and analgesic drug case were suffering from the lack of manpower.

On my side, we were outsourcing the investigation to adventurers but the adventurers themselves had their hands full with clearing the pile of requests that were neglected during the summer.

Realistically speaking, it was a terrible situation in which the only ones able to take proper actions were Lit and me.

“Sheesh, I can’t stand it anymore!”

Stormthunder snorted fiercely and dashed out.

“Oi, you lot! That’s enough!”

“Who are you!”

“You should name yourself before you ask for the other party’s name! I am Stormthunder! I run a furniture shop in Downtown here!”

“Stothun!”

“Doma, just go, it is a waste of time to talk to people like these.”

Stothun spoke to the mother who was involved.

The mother was a little lost but she quickly nodded and tried to leave but...

“Oi oi, don’t suddenly butt in our business!”

The two men stepped in to stop them.

“And so what about it!”

Stothun did not attempt to hide his boorish manners and grabbed the South Marsh man by his collar.

The man flew into a rage as he raised his right fist to punch Stothun.

“No no.”

I grabbed that hand from behind.

“Ba-bastard!”

“Stop it. If you punch Stothun, you won’t leave here unharmed.”

“Wha-what are you implying!”

“Take a look around you.”

“Around...!”

The Downtown residents have started gathering due to the disturbance.

“Ugh...”

Everyone was glaring at the two South Marsh people.

Everyone there knew about Stormthunder’s furniture shop and everyone there bought furniture from his shop.

If he punched that loveable Downtown Half-Orc craftsman, everyone would gladly join the fight.

“Ah, uh... shit, retards, remember this! All who opposed Big Hawk-san regret it in the end. Not a single person who opposed Big Hawk-san has come out unscathed so far!”

The people were shaken when Big Hawk’s name came out. The number two of the Thieves Guild still carried enough threat even in Downtown.

The men regained a little momentum.

The man sharply shook off my hand that was holding back his right hand and Stothun who was grabbing his collar and held his arms open as he turned around and mentioned Big Hawk’s name.

“I remember all your faces, a town like this, Big Hawk-san can destroy it whenever he feels like it, if I were you, I will brush up on my bootlicking skill while it’s not too late.”

“Heeh~ by the way, I don’t regret it though.”

A single woman passed off his caustic words with a cool face.

“I have gotten in the way of that guy’s business countless time so I believe he must hate me. In actual fact, his lackeys attacked me when I was sleeping but I retaliated by killing 20 of his lackeys for disrupting my sleep and he has never done anything to me since then. I don’t regret opposing him in any way.”

“He-he-hero Lit!?”

Lit placed her hand on her shotel handle as she smiled.

“Also, I patronize Stom’s shop too. I even bought the bed I’m using now from Stom. I would be troubled if Stom were to be injured.”

“Eh, ah... that...”

“By the way, I feel that 22 and 20 are the same, what do you think?”

“I’m sorry!!!”

The men screamed their apologies as they fled.

“As expected of Lit-san!”

“Thank you~ thank you~.”

Cheers of praise came from all around.

Lit waved her hands with a cheerful look that the two men before would never imagine.



Six days later. The promised day for the completion of the weapon.

“Be careful. Come back immediately without taking any detours.”

Lit waved at Al.

Al was on his way to receive the weapon he wished for.

Al was wearing a black cloak that covered his whole body.

He hid his face since he might be targeted.

“I’ll be going then.”

Al seemed nervous but his cheeks were flushed from the excitement of obtaining his own sword.



Rain was falling.

Summer had come and passed and the cold autumn rain gave the feeling of the coming of winter.

Perhaps it was cold as the body shivered under the cloak.

With a hand on the handle of the shoto around the waist, the cloak advanced forward.

After crossing that alley, Mogurim’s smithy would be right ahead.

”.....!”

The cloak that swayed with the footsteps stopped.

In the rain, it stood still while gazing forward.

Four in front. Four behind.

“Hehe... Al-kun.”

The men smiled widely. They held axes in their hands.

“Big Hawk-san is calling. Would you like to come with us?”

The men gradually closed in as they toyed around with their axes as if to show them off.

“Are you too afraid to even speak? Don’t worry, there’s no need to be afraid, we won’t hurt you as long as you come with us quietly.”

In other words, they were threatening to act violently otherwise.

The cloak looked down at the ground.

“...Kukuku.”

“What’s wrong Al-kun, have you gone insane from the fear?”

“Wa-wait, that voice doesn’t belong to a young man...”

The Cloak of Disguise fluttered as it was tossed into the air.

The girl smiled as she felt the illusion magic that was on her was dispelled and spoke.

“Did you think I was Al-kun? What a pity! It’s Lit-chan!”

Lit appeared beneath the cloak with the magic shotel that Al should have been holding on her waist.

She was sporting a smug look on her face.

“The Locate spell does not specify who is carrying the item! You guys got lured out!”

Without missing a beat, the two men behind her charged at her.

They probably thought that was the only time they had a chance of winning when she

still had not drawn her weapon.

However, by the time they charged past Lit, Lit already had shotels in both her hands and the two men collapsed to the ground after a spray of blood.

“Increasing from 20 people to 28 people isn’t much of a difference.”

Lit said with a fearless smile, causing the axe-wielding men to unconsciously take a step back.

However, a man took a step forward.

“Don’t worry, the number will stop at 27 when I join the count.”

“Really? Well, I guess that’s true... after all, you don’t seem to be human.”

The dual axe-wielding man opened his mouth widely.

The skin on the edges of his mouth ripped open and his body swelled to twice the size.

Dense expanded muscles wrapped around his red copper body and the two axes fused with his arms.

“I’ve always wanted to ask you, middle-rank Axe Demon.”

“Hou, very well, I’ll answer if I feel like it. What is it?”

“How do you wash your body with such hands? It should be quite troublesome but aren’t you bothered by the smell?”

“Impudent girl!”

Lit’s jest caused the demon’s red face to turn deeper crimson and it charged at her.

Lit intercepted the demon with the shotels in both her hands.

Chapter 38

Reunion with Ademi

Al, who had remained in the shop.

Flanking him were two subordinates of Guard Captain Moen, in charge of guarding and accompanying him.

Nobody said a word as the sound of rain hitting the roof echoed in the shop.

The plan was to capture the attackers who attack Lit in disguise as Al and drag them here to hand them over to the Guards.

There was no guarantee that she would really be attacked but Red said that the possibility was high.

Red should be following Lit from a distance as a back-up in the event that something unexpected happened.

And so those two Guards were in the shop.

Suddenly, the handle on the door rattled.

There was a 'Closed for today' notice hung on the door so it was probably not a customer.

Al's expression tensed.

One of the Guards drew the short sword on his waist and approached the door.

The other readied his halberd.

Al also drew his personal shotel that was secretly delivered yesterday night.

That action alone caused Al's fear to fade.

The new blade felt extremely familiar in his hand. Many times more so than that expensive magic sword. It felt as if it was an extension of his limbs.

“Who is it?”

The Guard who approached the door asked.

“It’s me.”

Al heard that voice before.

It belonged to that petite man who delivered the magic shotel.

“He’s a subordinate of Big Hawk!”

Al cautioned them with a firm tone while lowered his voice.

The Guard nodded to show that he understood... and unlocked the door.

“Eh?”

Al couldn’t understand what was happening.

The Guards who were supposed to protect him sheathed their sword and halberd and received that man while bowing to him in a servile manner.

The man was not dressed in a magician outfit like before but in his original thief outfit along with a poncho as shelter from the rain.

Underneath his clothes, he wore a chain shirt that does not make any noise when moving while retaining its function as an armor. His poncho was a high-grade item made using Fire Mouse skin which has strong fire resistance.

Behind that man were two bodyguards wrapped in black-hooded cloaks.

“Even though Big Hawk went through the trouble to prepare a present for Al-kun, you’re a bad boy for choosing to hold onto such a cheap article.”

The man smirked.

“Why...”

“It’s simple.”

When the man gave a signal, one of the bodyguards behind him took out two silver coin pouches and passed them to the Guards.

“Hehe, thank you very much.”

“Wha...”

“The Hero Lit probably thought she could draw us out but... isn’t making her think that the safest option? The hero will definitely notice the spell concealed in the weapon and try to draw us into a trap with it. It is our greatest chance to draw the Hero Lit away. That foolish girl who only has her physical strength to be proud of can never compete against our wisdom.”

Al drew his sword. However, the man gave a scornful smile and tossed a ball-shaped object he took from inside his sleeve.

It exploded with a bang at Al’s feet and scattered green mucus on him.

“Wha-, thi-this is!?”

“A Sticky Bomb. I may look like this but I possess the Divine Protection of the Alchemist.”

Al, who had his movements sealed, was carried by one of the bodyguards.

Seeing as to how the sticky matter did not stick to his cloak, they probably applied some kind of chemical on it in advance.

“What do you plan to do with me!”

“We won’t do anything bad. However, a hero is always needed during a revolution. Big Hawk-san’s reputation is a little too tarnished to be a hero and there’s another person

but they're not a South Marsh resident. On that note, you have a clean reputation and have the spectacular Divine Protection of the Weapon Master. We'll have you become the Hero of South Marsh."

"Hero...?"

"We'll let you meet Ademi."

"Ademi!? Where have you been hiding him this entire time... unless?"

The man smiled without answering.

"Oops, it will be bad if we stay too long and get seen by the people from Downtown. Let's beat it."

"Yes!"

Left with no choice, Al could only let them carry him to Big Hawk's mansion.



In the South Marsh district lined with dilapidated houses.

Big Hawk's lavish mansion surrounded by a sturdy fence stood out within that sight.

It was a stately three-floored mansion made of stone that was exceedingly vast perhaps due to the cheap land prices.

Within that mansion.

Al was lying on top of a red carpet.

He was directly tossed onto the carpet from the position he was carried in but the expensive carpet cushioned Al such that he didn't suffer any injuries.

"What do you intend to do to me!"

He tried to act tough but his voice trembled.

The shotel was no longer on Al's waist.

Al felt crushed after realizing that the bravery he had all along was but a transient emotion caused by his Divine Protection.

(I am still the same kid that cries from fear of the darkness...)

Al trembled with fear and did all he could to hold back his tears.

"So you are Al huh?"

Despite being 175cm tall, the abundance of flab on the fat Half-Orc made him look a lot larger than his real height.

"You are Big Hawk... san?"

Big Hawk's mouth of protruding fangs twisted. Al somehow understood that he was smiling.

"That's right my brethren. I am Big Hawk, the acting boss of South Marsh. You don't have to speak politely. To me, all South Marsh residents are my brethren. Don't worry and address me casually with 'san'."

Big Hawk approached Al with his style of smiling.

His thick finger grabbed onto his shoulder, causing a thin film of tears to finally appear in Al's eyes.

"Hou."

Big Hawk muttered quietly when he saw Al clenching his teeth and desperately holding it back.

“You seem like a kid with a strong will. As expected, my eyes were not wrong.”

“Wh-what do you mean?”

“Did they not tell you? I’ll have Al-kun become our hero.”

He could not comprehend it. Which was why it made Al even more afraid.

“I’ll explain it to you step-by-step. Firstly, I don’t think it needs any explanation but, the scene is the disastrous state of this South Marsh district. You are a resident of the South Marsh district so you should be aware too. We are outsiders. We migrated from other places and thought we could live in Zoltan but the Congressmen shoved us to this land.”

“I know...”

“That’s why I decided to rise up in the world from here. I made a name for myself in the Thieves Guild. Unlike the lazy residents of Zoltan, I was born and raised in the slums of the capital of the Principality of Daigun. It was not a lenient place like Zoltan. The ‘Poison and Daggers’ I experienced in the town of Daigun where four noble houses have continued to conspire against each other for decades can’t be compared to the small fries I encounter in Zoltan. I killed anybody who went against me even if they were my comrades. There isn’t anybody with the will to get revenge on me either. All of them just flee from me in fear.”

Big Hawk started talking about his brave sagas.

Al’s own teeth could not stop clattering as he listened to those brutal sagas that he wished he could close his ears to.

“In this way, I made myself an existence that the Congressmen could not touch. Do you think I have shown sufficient results?”

”.....”

“But it is not enough. I have the ability to reach greater heights. Rather than those idiotic lethargic worthless Zoltan residents, I can change this town if I become the leader of Zoltan!”

“What does that have to do with dragging me here?”

“The drug I scattered about. The Congress calls it the Fake God Drug but its real name is the ‘Devil’s Divine Protection.’”

“Devil’s Divine Protection?”

“Normally, absolutely only one Divine Protection is bestowed from the Gods. A person’s role and life are decided according to their Divine Protection and that Divine Protection can’t be changed. People live to fulfill the role assigned to them by the Gods.”

Big Hawk spread his arms wide.

“However, not everyone is satisfied with their Divine Protection. No, rather, most people are distressed by the gap between their desired lifestyle and the role required of them by their Divine Protection and pass away in disappointment! It should have been the same for me as well! My Divine Protection is Torture Master. A Divine Protection to be comforted by screams and sobs in some prison, to spend my life in some hole in the ground filled with the smell of blood, sweat, and urine! Will you be satisfied? I did not wish for such a life, I fought as a warrior of the Dark Continent, pillaged and killed en masse, I wanted to become like my father who passed away, a strong warrior who could act violently whenever and wherever!”

That was Big Hawk’s background.

Al could tell that this was what Red referred to as being a mere shadow of one’s former self after denying one’s own Divine Protection.

“The Devil’s Divine Protection was like gospel to people like us. That medicine bestows a new Divine Protection, weakens the impulse from your inherent Divine Protection and is basically a medicine that gives you the privilege to walk a new path in life. Everybody should be allowed to thread their desired path.”

“New Divine Protection?”

“The Devil’s Divine Protection is made using demon hearts as the raw material. The medicine in circulation now was made using the hearts of 50 Axe Demons. Thanks to that, there is now a shortage of axes in Zoltan. I wonder if my son’s shop is making

money after I told him to stock up in advance.”

“Demon hearts!?”

“I don’t know the theory behind it. To me, what’s important is not why it was made like that, but how I can make use of it. I will use the Devil’s Divine Protection as my weapon to become the King of Zoltan.”

In the beginning, Al thought he was just using it as a metaphor.

Zoltan was a republic which consisted of the Congress and the Mayor. Even though there was very little racial discrimination in Zoltan, without a noble background and furthermore, as a Half-Orc, there was no possibility of Big Hawk becoming a Congressman, let alone the Mayor regardless of how much money he throws at them.

That was why Al thought he meant it in the sense of becoming the leader of the Thieves Guild.

However, Al was convinced when he saw Big Hawk’s heated gaze.

He was serious. He actually wanted to conquer Zoltan and attempt to reign as king.

“With the South Marsh residents strengthened by the Devil’s Divine Protection and the people who can’t go against me due to their reliance on the Devil’s Divine Protection. I have made strategic arrangements for both the inner and outer workings of the Congress. All that is left is to ignite the smoldering flame and prepare the trigger.”

“Trigger?”

“That would be you, Al-kun.”

“Me?”

“Oi, bring it.”

Upon Big Hawk’s orders, the bodyguard, wrapped in a cloak like before despite being inside the house, left the room like a shadow.

After a while, a boy tied with rope was brought in.

“Ademi!”

Al cried out.

Ademi who was drooping weakly lifted his head upon hearing Al’s voice and his expression distorted when he saw his face.

“Sorry... it was not supposed to be like this.”

“Ademi...”

“I, just... only wanted to become a splendid Guard like my father, why did it turn out this way...”

Big Hawk and Ademi.

Both of them looked up to their fathers and were fellow sufferers suffering from the gap caused by the roles given to them by their Divine Protections.

But there was not a single trace of pity in Big Hawk’s expression as he basked in ecstasy with the realization of his dreams in front of his eyes.

Chapter 39

Big Hawk's public speech on his mad dreams

In the evening, Al was brought to the door leading to the mansion's balcony.

He had the green mucus on his body from the sticky bomb washed off, was changed into new clothes, and was made to wear a silver-colored breastplate adorned with glittering decorations.

Directly next to him was Ademi who was bound by rope and still dressed in his dirty and tattered clothes. He had probably been in those clothes for days.

"There won't be any danger. You only have to follow what your Divine Protection desires."

Big Hawk said with a profound smile.

Big Hawk opened the door with both hands and loud cheers could be heard.

"Wha...!?"

The scene that Al saw was a sea of cheering people that Big Hawk's large mansion grounds could seemingly not accommodate.

Most of them were South Marsh residents. Tattered clothes and dirty faces. However, their eyes were opened wide and sparkling as they raised both their hands and called out Big Hawk's name.

"Why..."

As far as Al knew, Big Hawk may be the boss but he was by no means liked by the people of South Marsh. In the first place, South Marsh with its many migrants have plenty of people with strong prejudice against Half-Orcs and there should be many

who call him 'Pig-face' behind his back.

"A person's likes and dislikes can be changed with just a slight trigger."

Big Hawk's fat-filled belly shook as he laughed.

"If I, a resident of South Marsh who is suffering, act as a representative to gather South Marsh's discontent and protest against the Congress, I can receive cheers like this and become a hero. The people seek a hero."

When Big Hawk waved his log-like arm, the masses cheered even louder.

"Our Big Hawk-san! Our boss!"

(No way, he is the scoundrel that caused everyone's suffering! Why is everyone getting deceived so easily!)

However, in reality, Big Hawk, who was feared due to his numerous cruel history, was being bathed in the cheers of people as if he was a hero as he waved comfortably.

"Now gentlemen. Just yesterday, I went to protest at Zoltan's Congress as well as the Guard's Military Station."

The cheers stopped.

The ones who were still cheering were shushed by those around them and everyone waited for Big Hawk's next words with earnest expressions.

"Of course, my goal was the despicable criminal who attacked this here Al-kun's family."

The South Marsh people raised angry shouts.

The angry shouts ceased when Big Hawk raised his hand but everyone was filled with sympathy for Al and hostility toward the Guards.

“I asked. Why couldn’t the Guards find a single young man despite mobilizing their entire force? And they replied. Because we were causing a riot.”

More angry jeers.

“I understood that it was just sophistry! After all, we are taking to the streets because we were not given justice, there is no way that asking for justice is instead an act of disturbing justice!”

“That is right! That is right!” Several voices of agreement chimed in.

“Therefore, there was only one truth! The Guards’ desired injustice. The perpetrator of the assault on Al-kun’s family was the Guard Captain’s son Ademi! Even the other Guards adored him! Instead of justice, instead of our suffering, they chose to protect their companion’s children. Do you resent them? Do you feel vexed? But this is Zoltan! We are outsiders! No matter how many of us pass away, neither the Congress nor the Guards nor Zoltan will shed a single tear! They will only ridicule us saying that the trash had died!”

Angry shouts started building up. It was even more feverish than before.

Big Hawk looked at the situation with a satisfied expression.

“But everyone here are cautious and wise South Marsh residents. Oppressed by the rich, fighting over mere scraps of bread. Is that not the life of a beggar? Can the true mastermind actually be the Guards? If you are looking for proof... very well, I will show you proof!”

From behind, the bodyguard still dressed in a cloak appeared while dragging Ademi and the two Guards that betrayed Al, all of whom were bound by rope.

“Hehe.....”

The Guards were a little suspicious but they were smiling.

“These two are bound by rope like this but they are the true Guards, the ones who know true justice!”

The two Guards took a step forward.

The two of them deeply bowed their heads toward the silent audience.

“I accuse ourselves! We have been harboring Ademi! Everything was done in order to ensure that all the appeals from Al-kun and everyone here were false accusations!”

There was an explosion of angry jeers in an instant.

“Silence! Quiet down!”

After Big Hawk shouted a number of times, the audience finally quiets down.

(Shit...!)

Al wanted to call nonsense on the entire farce. The Guards were poor actors so anybody could see that they were lying if they looked closely.

“Humans are easily tricked to believe the lies that they want to believe in.”

Big Hawk whispered that to Al’s ears.

Big Hawk’s thick finger grabbing onto Al’s neck could easily break it. If Al ever wanted to cry out the truth, he had enough strength to apply pressure and instantly silent him.

The Guards' poor farce continued and the audience reacted according to Big Hawk's expectations.

After their play to accuse the Guards and Congress of South Marsh's poverty, of their poor treatment, of the poor environment and even how Zoltan was a passageway for storms ended, Big Hawk once again addressed the audience.

"This is the evidence. Are there any who still don't believe it? Are there any who still believe that the Congress and the Guards stand for justice? Are there any who still doubt me, Big Hawk?"

"Big Hawk-san! Our boss!"

"Very good! With this, we are united. So now, for our next action on how to change this situation... it is time we discard our patience and tolerance!"

Ademi was forced to kneel.

"I shall proclaim here! This is not a shady scheme like those by the Thieves Guild! This is retribution done under the name of justice! This is a revolution!"

He passed Al the shotel.

"If the Guards will not judge evil, we shall do the judgment! If the Congress oppress us, we do not need the Congress!"

Ademi looked at Big Hawk with terrified eyes and shifted his gaze to Al.

"Take your revenge, Al-kun! Swing the blade of judgment down on the villain that assaulted your parents! Throw the villain's head into the flames of revolution and set off a fire that will recreate Zoltan!"

"Yo-you want me to kill Ademi!?"

“That’s right, regardless of the circumstances, the truth stands that Ademi attacked your parents. You witnessed that yourself that night.”

“Bu-but! Were you not the one who influenced him to do so!?”

“That is incorrect, we certainly did pass the medicine to Ademi. We also gave him an axe. We protected the fleeing Ademi. But that is all. Ademi lost to the impulses from the Devil’s Divine Protection and attacked your parents with the intent to slaughter them. Ademi himself wished for your death.”

Before that, Ademi was looking at Al asking to be saved but he lowered his eyes in shame after that was said about him.

“Even if we did not do anything, Ademi would continue to harass you. You should know very well just how many times Ademi had punched you, right?”

“...That is true but.”

“Furthermore, Ademi has two Divine Protections... your Divine Protection will grow greatly if you cut him down.”

[Thump] His Divine Protection throbbed.

The one standing in front of him was an enemy.

That night, the axe-wielding Ademi intended to kill me. If he wanted to kill me, then he can’t complain if he gets killed. He was an enemy after all. An enemy should be killed but he felt some hesitation.

Al’s thoughts were mixed with the battle impulses from his Divine Protection.

In any case, if he did not kill him, somebody else would.

In that case, wouldn’t it be better that I killed him while I still had reason to?

Al drew his Shotel.

He relived the pain he felt when Ademi punched him.

He recalled the hatred he felt at those times. The humiliation he felt from his tears

burnt his heart.

At that moment, Al's face was reflected on the blade of the shotel.

"Ah."

It was a face of hesitation. There was no trace of any impulse to do battle.

"I have decided."

Al raised his shotel. And then, he swung it down without hesitation.

Big Hawk grinned widely.

Ademi's restraining rope fell to the ground gently.

Ademi looked up at Al in surprise.

"Al..."

The smile on Big Hawk's face disappeared.

He looked at Al with an expressionless face and spoke in a flat tone.

"Did you miss your aim? Or are you hesitating?"

"No. My blade does not wish to kill Ademi. I will only cut whatever I wish to cut."

"...I'll ask you again, do you have no intention of reconsidering it?"

"My sword has decided to fight my and Ademi's enemy. I am a Weapon Master! My sword alone will not lie to me!"

"I see, plan B then."

Big Hawk raised his left hand.

The petite man with the Divine Protection of the Alchemist drew out an axe from the item box on his waist.

“Ah, uuu...”

Ademi cried in fear when he saw that.

“Ademi!?”

“It’s useless. Let me tell you the conditions to cause a person with the Devil’s Divine Protection to go berserk. After taking the medicine, the Devil’s Divine Protection will convert the person’s inherent Divine Protection level to its own. The more a person losses his inherent Divine Protection level, the more his Divine Protection impulses would decrease, causing the rush of euphoria and a sense of liberation that the users describe. However, when the Devil’s Divine Protection level overtakes the inherent Divine Protection’s level, the user will experience strong dependency and their personality will turn ferocious.”

“Ademi, get a hold of yourself!”

“In particular, it is terrible when all levels of the user’s inherent Divine Protection gets converted away. The influence from the medicine’s raw material, the Axe Demon, will appear and drive an urge to slaughter whenever the user sees an axe. That is the truth of the incidents that have occurred recently. Although, that is quite a convenient trait for us.”

Ademi charged at Al.

The conversation that happened on the balcony has not been transmitted to the audience below but they could tell that some abnormality had happened.

The audience murmured anxiously as they watched the balcony intently.

“Al-kun, you were a hero. Even though he tried to kill your family, you still chose the path of dialogue. However, the despicable Ademi has trampled on your feelings and responded with a tragedy of massacre by axe. This is an unforgivable act. Al-kun’s

corpse will show us that dialogue is pointless.”

Big Hawk shook his shoulders foolishly.

“That’s how the script goes, what do you think? I’m accepting any requests you have but... you should do it soon. Before you get killed by Ademi.”

The axe the Alchemist was holding was tossed to Ademi.

Al succumbed to a feeling of hopelessness but even then, he steadied his sword.

“Wha!?”

However, the next instant, the axe was split in two and the Alchemist man spurted blood from his shoulder and collapsed.

““The Hero Lit probably thought she could draw us out but... isn’t making her think that the safest option?’ was it? What a way to put it. Making you guys think that was the best option.”

The bodyguard dressed in a cloak who carried Al over had a copper sword in his hand.

He split the axe made of steel in two and cut down the Alchemist man.

“We’re jumping, grab on, Al!”

The cloaked man picked up Ademi and called out to Al.

Al clung to his neck.

“Im-impossible!? Webley! Have you gone insane!”

The bodyguard he referred to as Webley turned to face Big Hawk and lowered his hood

with a grin before hugging both the children and jumping off the third-floor balcony.



There are many magic tools such as the Cloak of Disguise, Illusion Magic, and Transformation Techniques meant to alter a person's appearance.

It was common knowledge to examine for traces of such disguise measures.

Naturally, Big Hawk did not fail to take measures against intruders using Detect Magic.

“That has an exploitable gap.”

Common Skill: Disguise

Clothes, makeup, acting. There were very few people who emphasize those techniques when going under disguise. Only idiots spend valuable skill points on skills that can be undone using magic.

That was why I had confidence that my disguise would not be discovered.

For that reason, I left Lit in charge of the investigation while I tailed the opponent I intended to use as a disguise and observed their movements.

“Hey, you're Red-san right!? Even though your face is different! Are you sure we will be fine if we fall from this height!?”

“Acrobatics Skill Mastery: Slow Fall!”

I occasionally kicked the walls as we fell to reduce our momentum.

Slow Fall was a Mastery Skill that allowed me to land while utilizing walls within arm's reach to decelerate.

That could be solved with just the 'Fly' spell so Ares complained about it harshly but it was a handy skill to me as I often moved ahead of the group on my own.

After I had landed safely, I lightly waved at Big Hawk who was leaning over the balcony

and still did not have a grasp of the situation. And then, I fled the scene while carrying the two children.

His figure was a long distance away by the time I heard Big Hawk shouting for me to return.

Chapter 40

My name is Albert

“Ademi, drink this for now.”

I passed Ademi, who had vacant eyes, a small vial filled with liquid medicine.

“It’s a little bitter.”

Ademi downed the contents of the small vial as he was asked.

His eyes immediately quivered violently until even the whites of his eyes could be seen as he groaned.

“Dis... gustingggg.”

“It is a delicate medicine so I could not put anything in to adjust the flavor.”

“Ah, eh, I somehow feel a little more comfortable...”

“It lowers your skill level for a time, well, it is something like a type of poison. It is apparently medicine created by Wild Elves that can temporarily suppress the impulses from Divine Protections. I’m glad that it seems to be effective on the Devil’s Divine Protection as well.”

“Wild Elf medicine!? How do you know something like that!”

Al and Ademi both gave shocked expressions.

“Suppressing Divine Protections will cause the Holy Church to be angry so it is our secret, okay?”

I said with my index finger on my lips and the two of them nodded multiple times.

Despite the situation we were in, youngsters are tough creatures as they now had slightly excited looks after being part of a secret.

“Now then, according to Lit, he should be around here.”

The investigation Lit was in charge of made tremendous progress these few days.

Apparently, she found an excellent collaborator.

They had magnificently investigated that Big Hawk was confining Ademi, that he was plotting something using Ademi and Al, and even his ultimate goal.

She had certainly found an extremely excellent collaborator.

Although she said that he was a nomadic adventurer...

“She mentioned that he carries a sword kept in a red sheath.”

Most of the South Marsh residents were gathered at Big Hawk’s mansion so the area was quiet.

Speaking of sounds, I could hear the cries of a baby from a house far away, perhaps the baby was kept waiting at home.

“If he asked me to wait here, he should be quite a considerable user of invisibility.”

I could not sense any presence at all.

I surveyed the surroundings while maintaining vigilance.

When my gaze landed on a dilapidated house to my right, a human figure appeared from the shadows.

He was a good-looking youth with darkish skin.

He had an exotic-looking long sword kept in a red sheath on his waist.

“You are Red-san, right?”

“So you are the collaborator Lit spoke of? Byuui?”

The youth showed a refreshing smile.

However, Red sensed something from that youth that made him keep his guard up.

“Yes, I am Byuui. I had to spend some time to disperse the nearby spirits that have been sprinkled on Al-kun and Ademi-kun.”

“You sure do a thorough job. Afterward, we’ll proceed as planned.”

“What are you guys talking about?”

Al asked uneasily as he could not understand what Byuui and I were talking about.

“We’re talking about beating Big Hawk’s ass.”

Al’s eyes opened wide in shock after he heard me say that.

“Sorry for leaving you guys out of the loop, we’ll have to include you two as well.”

The two of them had crucial roles to play.

Or rather, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say that these two would defeat Big Hawk.

At that time,

“Red-san.”

Byuui gave a short but sharp warning.

“I know. Eleven people huh?”

I sensed the presence of 11 beings approaching us.

Nine of them had pretty good concealment skills. They were probably Stalker Demons.

They were the demons that Lit fought against.

“I’ll take care of half of them.

Byuui drew his sword.

He held his sword with his left hand, lowered his waist and thrust his right hand forward in a stance.

It was a stance I had never seen before but it felt like a technical stance that did not rely purely on skill.

I could probably rely on him... but.

“I’ll hold them back here. Byuui, please bring Al-kun and Ademi-kun to the scheduled location.”

“I don’t mind but are you sure? We still don’t know the combat ability of our opponents.”

“I only plan to stall them. It won’t be a problem.”

“...I guess that is true, all right. I will make sure to deliver the two of them safely.”

“Thanks.”

“Red-san?”

“Byuui will explain to you what you should do.”

“Wi-will you be all right? The enemy is coming.”

“Yeah, I’ll definitely be fine. Our victory has already been decided. Now, hurry up and go.”

After signaling to Byuui with my eye, he grabbed hold of their hands.

“Re-red-san! Teach me the sword another time okay!”

“Sure, it’s a promise.”

The two of them left with Byuui in the lead.

Despite that, the enemy presence was still headed directly toward me.

“As expected.”

His armor was slightly heavier on the left side due to the decorations so his footsteps were not uniform and there were slight irregularities.

I knew that footstep rhythm.

Eleven human figures appeared in under a minute.

“Hey, Albert.”

“Address me with ‘san’, D-rank.”

Albert shot a sharp gaze at me with his rounded-tip executioner’s sword already drawn.

Chapter 41

Birth of a Hero

The ones who appeared were Albert, nine Stalker Demons with their faces covered by black cloths, and an expressionless Big Hawk.

Wait a minute, why was Big Hawk here?

There was no way he could have chased after me in such a short time...

"I knew I wasn't wrong. You belong to the hero category just like me."

Albert ignored my surprise and spoke with grand gestures.

"You might have believed that you had outwitted us but you are too predictable. This degree is within expectations."

What a lie, it was just because Big Hawk was backing him.

The response was too late if this was within expectations. They had already lost half the battle when I succeeded in taking Al and Ademi away from that location.

"Albert, why is Big Hawk here?"

Albert blabbered on about various things after that but it didn't seem like he would answer my doubts so I actively asked the question myself.

"That is..."

"That is because this Big Hawk is just a husk."

Big Hawk's voice sounded out, intercepting Albert's voice as he tried to explain.

That voice had a bell-like ring to it that was pleasant to the ears so it was clearly different from Big Hawk's voice.

"...I see, the last doubt I had has cleared up now. Even if you obtained the knowledge to make that drug from somewhere, I was wondering just how did you guys succeed in sacrificing 50 intermediate-rank demons. That was the only aspect that I couldn't understand but so it was because you guys had a Contract Demon backing you guys."



Big Hawk's face distorted hideously.

"The one who made a wish to me. This being wished to become the King of Zoltan. That's why I lent my strength. I took over the body of this incompetent man who lacked a single piece of intelligence and in exchange, I will become the King with this man's ability and personality. This man's consciousness is still present. This man will see and feel what I experience. He will be able to enjoy both gastronomical sensations and beautiful maidens. There is just a minor flaw in which he can't even move a single tip of a finger but I believe he is satisfied."

Contract Demon. The Devil's contract.

There were famous stories of contracts and demons that would grant your wishes.

The majority of those stories ended in tragedy. The foolish contractors' soul gets absorbed by the Contract Demon's Divine Protection and was used to raise their Divine Protection level or as material for their demon equipment.

The protagonist was this Senior-rank Demon. By exchanging contracts to fulfill the wishes of those apart from demons, they could utilize powerful spells that they normally aren't able to... they would be able to exercise power equivalent to the Gods, capable of altering reality.

Senior-rank Demons possess skills that guarantee absolute obedience from lower-ranked demons. According to scholars on demons, Lower-rank Demons apparently also possessed skills with the effect of forcing obedience toward Senior-rank Demons. Not only their Divine Protection impulses, even their skills also bind them to that act.

Using that power, it probably summoned Axe Demons and used them as sacrifices.

And the fearful aspect was that the knowledge of that drug definitely came from this demon.

"Senior-rank Demon huh?"

Even though it was not a demon oriented toward direct confrontations...

(It is not an opponent that I can decently win against in a fight.)

In this situation, even without Ruti, if I had Danan or Yarandorara as my companion and still had Thunder Waker equipped, I would have more than sufficient chance of a perfect victory.

However now, I was alone. I didn't have a single magic equipment, just a copper sword as a weapon.

It was not a condition to fight a Senior-rank Demon.

Nevertheless,

"Similarly, your side probably can't decently win the fight either."

"....."

The expression on the giant-orc-figure demon did not change.

However, I was sure that my prediction was correct.

"If a Contract Demon actually took action, it should have been a lot easier to control Zoltan. Why did you not do that?"

"...Why do you think that was the case?"

"I know a little on Demon Study too. I have read quite a few papers regarding Contract Demons. The contracts of Contract Demons possess amazing power but at the same time, they have aspects that even the Contract Demons can't control. Right?"

"I wonder?"

"The contract was to make Big Hawk Zoltan's king. For that sake, you took over Big Hawk's body, perpetrated all kinds of evil acts as Big Hawk... but your progress stopped at the Number two of the Thieves Guild. That's certainly awkward."

The Contract Demon's face distorted slightly.

“It is not just for show that this is called the town of laziness. The mayor and the various guild leaders and even in the Thieves Guild that presides over the underground society, the top management here are all 100% decided by seniority.”

That was right.

In this town, the promotion to the top was depending on seniority.

After reaching a certain position, a person’s achievements, Divine Protection, and even personality were irrelevant.

The seniors are great and wise while the younger members relax and wait for their age to rise. There was no room for ambition.

Why?

“It’s because disputes were a hassle. Your turn would come even if you don’t work hard. That’s all that mattered. Big Hawk was the Number two of the Thieves Guild but it didn’t mean that he held the title of Vice-Guild Leader. It just meant that his ability was at that level. No matter how excellent he was, he would have to wait another 20 years before he could become the leader of the Thieves Guild.”

“...Sheesh, seriously, this town is beyond help.”

The Contract Demon covered his eyes with a single hand and shook his head at the deplorable situation.

“I have fulfilled similar wishes like this. With my knowledge and judgment and Demon Divine Protection, it should have been an easy task. I confess, I’m beat. No matter how many achievements I stacked, no matter how much rewards I prepared, they shook their head because it was a custom. Zoltan people are incredible sloths.”

“As you are bound by contract, you can’t discard Big Hawk’s body. The wish of the contract has already been cast. Failing to grant that wish will mean that you default on the contract after all.”

If that happened, the demon would have to release Big Hawk's soul. In the case of a contract default, the demon will have to return everything it stole from the contractor and its Divine Protection level will drop by a few levels too.

In other words, it would take a big loss.

"That's when Albert, another outsider in a similar situation, caught your eye."

It was a well-known fact that Albert was friendly with the Thieves Guild.

There were a number of testimonies that stated Big Hawk was the mediator in his interaction with the guild and that he was his backer.

The Contract Demon could not use any power that Big Hawk did not possess according to the contract but that same contract ability can also allow it to cause miracles even in the form of Big Hawk.

The Contract Demon could no longer dodge the facts after I had said that much so it agreed with my words.

"Not anybody can be chosen as contractors. Unless they possess sufficiently strong intent while still harboring darkness in their hearts. To fulfill that point, Zoltan was the worst location. Even though everyone harbored some kind of dissatisfaction, they all gave up, thinking that it couldn't be helped. The sin of sloth does have its own utility value but they are not suitable as contractors. It was my good fortune that Albert came here."

Albert's Divine Protection was The Champion.

A hero from birth. However, he was not able to achieve much.

Although he was not weak, he was only mediocre and could not pass as a B-rank Adventurer individually so he had to have a party assist him in his activities and was enrolled to form a B-rank party.

There were many factors for that; he did not have anyone around him who could teach him how to acquire the skills of the Divine Protection of The Champion, his own lack

of talent as well as his poor spirit of cooperativeness.

But, the point that was important at this moment, was that he was not satisfied with his current circumstances.

After all, he was The Champion.

“In Zoltan, Albert could pass off as a B-rank adventurer. When Albert arrived, the B-rank adventurers in this town were the previous mayor, Mistome-shi, the Adventurers Guild’s executive, Garadin, Bishop Cien from the Holy Church, and Guard Captain Moen. Those four formed a party and found time among their busy schedule to cope with situations that required them. There was an extreme lack of manpower. Even if he was a little lacking in ability, they shut one eye as he possessed an ability close to that of a B-rank.”

Albert’s face distorted slightly upon hearing the Contract Demon’s words.

Even though it was the truth, those words were probably unpleasant to Albert.

I also heard from Moen that the situation at that time was terrible.

In addition to being busy with their main job, leaving aside Moen who was still active as a Guard, the remaining three were at an age that it was not strange for them to retire and they lacked combat training in their regular work. There were apparently countless incidents where they were faced with danger even when fighting against weaker opponents.

Albert became Zoltan’s hero.

“However, I utterly hate this Zoltan.”

Spat Albert.

“Despite having a problem in front of their eyes that required adventurers to solve, those trash decide to ignore it just because it was a hassle. Good-for-nothings that will

complain non-stop once you looked away. Those are my companions? Those are B-rank adventurers like me? I will never recognize it! And myself living among such trash! A town that would make a fuss over the extermination of an Owlbear! And why would I feel heroic for such a deed! What has my life been for if I stagnate in this town!!”

Perhaps the more the people of Zoltan applauded Albert as a hero and the more he saw the figures of his companions enjoying life without any concern, the more it acted as a source for the darkness in his heart to grow.

That was when the demon took advantage of him.

“...But don’t worry, D-rank. I am a man who will become a hero. Even if I form a contract with a Contract Demon, I will not be complicit in an evil plot.”

“You say that after so many incidents had happened? There have been casualties.”

“A necessary sacrifice. My wish is for this Zoltan to be united and join the fight against the Demon Lord army so I need a town with combat ability and strong spirit to match that. The sacrifice of blood is needed for a revolution.”

“Against the Demon Lord army?”

“After listening to this, Red, you should understand that our and your actions are absolutely not evil.”

The Contract Demon continued on.

“Firstly, the current Demon Lord army is different from the likes of the previous Demon Lords who are the mainstream faction that attacked this Avalon Continent... we call it the Dazzling Continent... countless times. Because this Demon Lord has conquered many races, everyone is obeying him. The Demon races that have not been conquered and the Dwarf race that still maintain their power have colluded to form a resistance army and are fighting against the Demon Lord army... but the situation is not looking good.”

“And so?”

“I am obviously here to fulfill this Half-Orc’s wish but at the same time, I also want Zoltan that is in the backlines to actively fight the Demon Lord army as well.”

What the heck? The conversation has flown to a remarkable direction.

“Albert’s wish is to become a Hero that defeats the Demon Lord along with other heroes. The compensation for the contract is not his soul but his lifespan until he defeats the Demon Lord so I will support him until his battle with the Demon Lord. What do you think? Don’t you think it can be said to be a contract with absolutely no evil intent?”

“Is that true, Albert?”

“Yeah, it’s true.”

Albert answered while staring at me straight in the eye.

His eyes were burning with ambition.

“With the power I received from this demon, I now have the Magic Sword Vorpall Blade that can kill any monster! In addition, the Devil’s Divine Protection that can confer fighting ability even to those with trash Divine Protections! I will take control over Zoltan’s Congress and become the General. Then, I will turn this Zoltan into a military state and join the fight with the heroes!”

Albert howled.

At that moment, Albert probably saw himself facing the approaching soldiers of the Demon Lord army as he stood side-by-side with Hero Ruti, the Martial Artist Danan, and the troops brandishing their spears in response to his shout.

“I am The Champion Albert! At this moment, I am not the leftover scrap Adventurer Albert who can only shine in the border town, but a person befitting of the heroic Divine Protection! I will become a hero who fights the Demon Lord! I will transform into my true self!”

I, who distanced myself from the Hero party, and Albert, who aims to be in the Hero party.

We were both outcast due to our combat ability but we were a complete contrast in all other aspects.

Chapter 42

The end of a man who tried to be a hero

The South Marsh residents who gathered at Big Hawk's mansion were in a flurry.

Al saved Ademi, who was apparently sheltered by the Guards, and another different man kidnapped them.

Big Hawk anxiously retreated back into his mansion and one of Big Hawk's subordinate told them to wait at the spot but it had been quite some time.

The people's anxiety rose the longer they were made to wait.

Soon, quarrels over trivial matters started everywhere and it was a situation in which it wouldn't be strange if a brawl happened.

"He-hey! Look!"

At that moment, a man at the back shouted.

The sound of countless footsteps, of ringing metal armor and a battle line made of dazzling halberds that reflected the setting sun.

"I-it's the Guards! They are in full gear!"

They surrounded Big Hawk's mansion in the blink of the eye and the Guards arrayed themselves with their halberds held facing up.

They were not dressed in the light gear they wore during patrols.

They wore heavy armor called a half-plate, with steel breastplates that covered their upper body only and chainmail that protected their arms and feet, along with long swords and crossbows on their waists.

In addition, they had halberds, two-meter-long pole weapons, in their hands.

These were the Guards' full gear only used in emergency situations such as war or riots.

Versus the South Marsh residents with not a single proper weapon.

There were some who did have some degree of gear like knives, short clubs or short swords for self-defense and light leather armor but the fact that they were familiar with equipment caused many of them to be appalled at the difference in their combat ability compared to the fully equipped Guards, as they felt the premonition of defeat.



Over half of the setting sun that illuminated the South Marsh district had sunk below the horizon before I realized.

"Do you understand the situation now, D-rank?"

"Kind of."

Albert said with his sword pointed at me.

I had my copper sword drawn and ready as I listened to him.

"...Do you recall that I invited you to join my party previously?"

"Of course, that happened just recently."

"At that time, you intentionally tried to act incompetently. I knew my judgment wasn't wrong."

"...Maybe, so, what now?"

"I'll ask you once more. Become my companion, Red. You are a person who can become a hero... just like me."

Albert lowered his sword and gestured like he was reaching out with his hand.

The distance between us was about 15 steps. It was a distance where we could clash stances and strike if we attacked at the same time.

Our discussion was still ongoing but there was blazing tension in between us.

“Red, I do not know the reason why you are trying to hide your strength. But those with the ability have the duty to utilize their strength. My Divine Protection of The Champion and the Divine Protection residing in your body shouldn’t be the kind that should rot in a border town like this.”

“It’s not something so impressive though.”

“Give it a break! Your strength is the real deal!”

Albert shouted loudly.

“Make your choice, D-rank! Join me and become a hero who fights the Demon Lord! Or defeat me and become a hero who saved Zoltan! Choose one option!”

“Hero huh?”

“Yes, a hero! Your choice will determine the fate of Zoltan! You might even be deciding the fate of the world! Isn’t it exhilarating! At this very moment, the center of the world is in this remote region called Zoltan!”

While he was shouting, Albert started grinning unconsciously.

He could finally become an existence that he wished to be. Even if it was just self-satisfaction with no substance to back it...

“It’s about time huh?”

“What do you mean!?”

“Sorry, Albert.”

Countless running footsteps approached us.

Albert's expression distorted with astonishment.

"Yo-you... why? Shouldn't this fight lead to a deciding battle between us heroes..."

"I do not wish to become a hero."

That was not the location to settle the incident.

And the hero was neither of us.



Even though they understood that they had no chance of winning, using their hatred toward the Guards fanned by Big Hawk as a weapon, the South Marsh residents wanted to let Zoltan know the wrath of South Marsh even if they were to lose and showed that they would put up fierce resistance until the very end.

In reality, most of the instigation was done by Big Hawk's subordinates that he had mixed into the crowd beforehand so the majority of the crowd just picked up the weapons passed to them from Big Hawk's mansion and had nervous expressions.

Guard Captain Moen observed their state.

"They have the advantage in numbers but they have neither weapons nor armors."

Moen murmured.

While frightened, the crowd of front-liners holding long spears glared at him.

Despite being the very first row, half of them weren't even wearing armor.

"I guess it's natural, they are not soldiers and this is not a battlefield either."

"...Yeah."

Moen responded with a slightly tired voice after his subordinate said that. They were not soldiers, just regular citizens.

The reason they came in full gear was to make the opponent lose their will to fight.

In actual fact, it had quite a visible effect but it had not reached the stage where they threw down their weapons.

They needed a push from some other source.

“Captain!”

At that moment, an out-of-breath Guard ran up.

“What’s wrong.”

“It’s regarding Young Master Ademi!”

“What!? Have you found him!?”

After a short while, two youngsters were brought over by a young man with dark skin tone.

It was Byuui.

Even though Moen had seen most of Zoltan’s residents, he had not seen that man before but he had no time to bother about it at that moment. He quickly forgot the faint sense of discomfort he sensed from that young man.

“Ademi!”

“Father!”

The two of them happily hugged each other.

“I’m sorry, father... I...”

“It is all right as long as you are fine. If there is anybody you must apologize to, I will apologize with you; if there is anything you must compensate for, I will compensate for it with you. You don’t have to apologize to me as you are my son.”

“Father...!”

“I’m sorry for interrupting the touching reunion but.”

Byuui interrupted them, looking like he was not actually sorry.

“Let’s settle this.”

Moen and Ademi nodded with slightly red faces.



The Guards and South Marsh residents were facing off in a confrontation that was on a hair-trigger.

There was a clear difference in equipment and proficiency but the South Marsh side had a fort in the shape of Big Hawk’s mansion surrounded by a fence.

That made them believe that it might actually be possible to win.

“Tch, what a terrible situation.”

A man from South Marsh holding a spear complained.

Unlike those behind, staring at the armors of the Guards at the frontline reflecting the setting sun, he totally could not see any chance of winning.

He was trying to think of how to escape from that place but he was completely surrounded. Even if he wanted to surrender, he had the other South Marsh residents directly behind him.

“What can we do, I was an idiot for believing the words of that pig-face.”

“You’re right on that.”

The men wished for some opportunity as they said that.

An opportunity to throw down their weapons before the equilibrium collapsed and before the fight could no longer be stopped.

“Everyone!”

Children’s voices echoed out.

The frontline of the Guards split into two and two youngsters stepped out.

The two of them had nervous complexions but their eyes were shining with a clear purpose.

“Oh my, isn’t that Al!? And beside him is that bastard Ademi!”

The South Marsh side stirred.

“Fly.”

Byuui used a spell to grant the two youngsters invisible magical wings to fly into the air.

The two of them floated up and moved to a height where everyone could see them.

“Everyone!”

Al shouted once more.

“Al! What happened! Did the Guards capture you!?”

“No, I am here of my own intent. It is the same for Ademi.”

“Yes, I am here of my own intent.”

The crowd stirred without understanding the situation.

(Before coming here, I thought of all kinds of things to say.)

Al and Ademi's roles were to prevent the fight there from occurring.

The two people involved in the incident should be able to stop the fighting. Byuui told the two of them that.

(Tell them the truth? Have Ademi apologize? Exclaim that Big Hawk had tricked everyone?)

Just in case, Al had the draft that Byuui passed to him inside his pocket.

The lost Al stretched his hand into his pocket and touched the draft...

(No.)

He crushed it in his hand.

And touched his prized shoto on his waist.

He closed his eyes for a little while...

"Everyone."

Al announced.

"Let's go home, nothing has happened here yet, nobody has been injured, so let's just go home."

"Wha!?"

"I am friends with Ademi. I plan to play with him again tomorrow as well. So let's go home."

"Don't speak nonsense! That Ademi tried to kill your family!"

“No, that was not Ademi but a demon in Ademi’s form. If everyone continues to drink that medicine, you will end up as demons who will hurt your important friends so let’s go home before that happens.”

Al said and took Ademi’s hand.

Looking at the two of them, Moen quickly raised his right hand to give the signal.

The Guards moved and opened a path of return on which the setting sun shone upon.

“...Al, are you forgiving that boy?”

“I forgive him.”

A clang of metal. The man at the very frontline threw down his spear.

The man walked out with a tense expression.

“He-hey.”

“This fight was to avenge Al, well, he’s not dead though. If he has forgiven him then I have no reason to fight too.”

The man directly behind him tried to reach out to stop him but,

Clang, clang, clang clang clang...

The sound of discarded weapons rang out one after the other and the people started walking back to their own homes.

The fighting had ended.

The South Marsh residents themselves looking for an opportunity to escape was a large factor. If Red, Lit, Moen and the others did not set the stage from the beginning, it would not have reached such a conclusion.

However, it was also the truth that Al and Ademi prevented the fight before it

happened.

Al and Ademi lined up to see off the figures of the South Marsh residents passing between the Guards anxiously before returning home with relieved expressions.



“Why, whyyy!!”

Albert screamed with a voice that made me wonder if his throat would split apart.

His bloodshot eyes were wide open and he tore at his hair.

Albert and his group were surrounded by the Guards.

Even though there were nine intermediate-rank demons, Stalker Demons were assassins. They were strong in circumstances where they held the advantage but fighting in direct confrontational situations like this where the opponents held the numerical advantage was disadvantageous to them.

Furthermore,

“You have underestimated our town quite a bit.”

A tall man stood in an imposing stance with his hands crossed in front of his chest as he looked down at them.

A member of Zoltan’s once strongest adventurer party, the Adventurers Guild’s executive, Garadin was there too.

“This...”

The Contract Demon in Big Hawk’s appearance could not hide his disappointment.

He asked Red with a feeble expression.

“Red, are you fine with this method? There will be sacrifices among the Guards, you know? Even though nobody would be injured if you had fought instead.”

“I am a D-rank adventurer. Furthermore, I just run an apothecary... it is the Guard’s role to arrest you guys, not mine. They have trained for this very task.”

“Whyyyy!”

Albert shrieked.

The force of it caused the Guards surrounding him to unconsciously take half a step back.

“Albert.”

“You could have become a hero, you know!? It was supposed to be a fight in Zoltan with fate on the line! Despite all that, why! Why do you throw it away even though you possess such power!”

“...I’m actually not concerned about becoming a hero or not. I am content with staying with Lit and running a small apothecary.”

“I hate it! At least! At least give me a foe that only a hero can defeat! Give me a reason for my life! I am The Champion Albert! I-I will not accept an end where I am captured by Guards like a filthy criminal like this!!”

“Stop it, Albert!”

The Contract Demon called him to stop but Albert raised his sword and charged straight at me.

Albert swung his magic sword Vorpall Blade down, aiming for my neck.

I drew my copper sword and brandished it once.

Clang!

The sound of a sword crashing to the ground. The magic sword had fallen behind me.

Albert stared in a daze at his right arm where his magic sword up until his wrist was missing.

“I knew it.”

”.....”

“I knew you could defeat me whenever you wanted to...”

Red tears flooded Albert’s bloodshot eyes.

“You could have destroyed our conspiracy in an instant if you wanted to, couldn’t you? This is too much... this is way too much...”

Albert fell to his knees and covered his face with his remaining left hand.

“Albert, a hero is not someone with just the strength for it.”

“Are you planning to preach to me as well?”

“No. I wasn’t the one... Albert. I wanted you to be the one to save Zoltan from this crisis. You, the person who has been aiming to be a hero more than anyone else in this town and has always been suffering for it. Not me, you.”

I spoke the truth.

I was evaluating Albert. Of course, he had plenty of flaws. His personality was bad too. In the first place, he lacked the ability too.

But exactly because of that fact, I was evaluating Albert who struggled despite his lack of ability, who pulled his unreliable companions to become better, who worked hard to gain an identity befitting himself while forced into an undeserved position.

“To me, no matter how many faults you had, you were Zoltan’s hero.”

I could not tell what Albert thought after hearing those words. After all, I did not possess a skill to read people's heart.

Albert just hung his head feebly and allowed himself to be arrested by the Guards without giving any further resistance.

Chapter 43

Let's take a bath after hard work

Five days after the incident.

“Not yet? Not yet?”

“Hn, yeah just a while longer.”

I placed my hand into the bathtub to check the temperature.

It was still a little tepid.

We were in the bathroom which Gonz had just informed us of its completion.

Lit and I immediately started pouring hot water into the bath so that we could enter.

In the bathroom were one large bathtub which could fit about three people and another small pot-shaped bathtub.

There was a stove installed in a small room separated from the bathroom by a door and a pipe from that stove heated the bath water.

In addition, it was an ingenious design whereby leaving the door open and opening the stove pipe would turn the bathroom into a sauna.

Baths were meant to ward off sickness and there were different kinds of baths built in different lands in the Avalon Continent but I felt that the Zoltan-style of the bathroom made using a stove and pipe was pretty convenient.

In the Imperial Capital, the common setup was to have the fire outside and channel the heating below the flooring. That setup could quickly heat the place up but the downside was that adjustment of the fire could not be done from within the bathroom.

Well, Lit was capable of warming the water herself using magic but temperature

control was difficult and most of the time it would result in boiling water instead. Furthermore, the plan was to relax in a bath so having to use magic which required concentration would be too tiresome.

“Great, it should be just nice soon!”

“Yay!”

When I looked over, I saw that Lit had already taken off all her clothes and she was not even trying to hide herself using the bath towel.

“Wha, you...!”

“Red too, hurry up and get out of your clothes.”

“Wasn’t the plan to wear swimwear?”

“Coward!”

Thi-this girl!

There was no helping it if she said it that way. In any case, there was no reason why I should refuse if Lit was okay with it.

Although it was a little embarrassing.

It was nothing much but please forgive me if my eyes were to be a little restless.

Buck-naked, we entered the bathtub facing each other.

“”Ahhhhhhhhhh~””

Both our sighs of relaxation echoed within the bathroom.

“So tired~”

“I’m tired too, it’s been a long time since I fought seriously so I’m still having muscle

pains.”

“Ei.”

Lit playfully poked my flank with the tip of her feet.

“Ugeh.”

Dull muscle ache ran through my stomach.

I also poked Lit’s stomach in response and she also cried out ‘Ugeh’.

It’s been a long time since Lit fought seriously too so she was having muscle aches as well.

“I guess it’s still a must to exercise the body once in a while.”

“I wonder about that~ Incidents like this rarely happens after all.”

We both sighed together.

Floating in the bathtub was very comfortable so I closed my eyes and entrusted my body to the hot water.

“I’m glad we had a bath made.”

We added a bathroom extension using the reward we received from the recent incident.

Well, the construction fee for the bathroom was only 130 Peryl so it wasn’t that expensive.

In addition, as we were the ones who solved the incident, the carpenters from Downtown all gathered for ‘Our town’s Hero Lit and Apothecary Red’ and ended up finishing eight days worth of construction in just five days.

The carpenters were excessively happy whenever I passed them the lunch I made for them every day and told us to feel free to call them whenever we want another room

constructed.

We still have the reward money we received so maybe we could consider making a greenhouse in the garden or a brewing room to try my hand in making herbal liquor.

A soft sensation touched my chest.

“Hn?”

Opening my eyes, I saw Lit directly in front of me with a mischievous smile.

That sensation just now... was the feeling of Lit’s breast touching me huh?

It seemed that she actually used a concealment skill to not cause a single ripple in the bathtub as she approached me.

She was using her full power even when fooling around.

I was pretending to be cool but in actual fact, I was completely flustered.

“Ni hi.”

Lit was laughing too but her face was beet red too. It probably wasn’t because of the heat.

Every time, even though Lit was actually embarrassed, she still appealed to me like that.

“Oh?”

I grabbed Lit’s shoulder. Then, I spun her around and placed my chest on her back.

Then, I embraced her in that position.

“Oh-”

She was pretending to be calm but Lit's body was stiff.

But she quickly relaxed and leaned her body weight onto me.

Lit's body was warm.

"Hey, Red."

"What is it?"

"Was it really all right? If you went with Albert, you might have been able to return to the Hero party. Ares might even have reevaluated you too."

"That's out of the question. It might have been different if it was when I just came here but... now it's not an option at all."

"But the heroes might be struggling. They might be hoping that you would return."

Lit sounded worried judging by her tone.

I guess I should make her understand properly after all.

I hugged Lit tightly.

I buried my nose in her golden hair. It smelled good.

"Even if that was true, I will not return. Leaving aside contributing to the heroes' combat strength, Albert might have been able to do so and there are plenty of other hero candidates in other towns... but Lit is only present in this town."

No, that's wrong.

"That's not it. All right, I'll say it clearly."

"?"

"I love Lit. I love you very much. Probably a hundred times more than how much you think I love you."

“Wh, eh, ah...!?”

“That’s why I will remain here. No matter what anybody says. I wish to remain by Lit’s side more than being a hero.”

Lit didn’t have her usual bandana to cover her mouth so she submerged half her face in the bath to conceal her grin.

I felt that Lit had been feeling uneasy lately but I believe her unease should disappear from this day onward.

Once again, we could return to our ordinary days.



Albert and Big Hawk were arrested without any resistance.

Although the surviving demons defeated the Guards and fled.

Just today, the last Stalker Demons that had escaped was finally subdued.

It was Byuui who subjugated them.

As he still did not belong to any Adventurers Guild, he was a mysterious swordsman with an unknown history.

“For the time being, he has declared that he was a touring aristocrat. But he is the fourth son so he does not have inheritance rights.”

“The Maudesta family? An aristocrat from the Kingdom of Flamberg? But that country fell to ruin after the war with the Demon Lord army.”

“Just because the country fell to ruin doesn’t mean that the aristocrat family would disappear. Maudesta family’s legal wife is the daughter of an aristocrat from the Veronia Kingdom. Apparently, they are currently taking refuge in their territory.”

“I see. By the way, where did you get that information from?”

“Byuui told it to me himself.”

“I wonder just how much of it is true.”

The ones present were the Adventurers Guild’s executives. As well as Mayor Tornado who was stroking his prided beard.

“But such issues don’t matter. Take it to the extreme, it doesn’t matter even if Byuui is a fugitive murderer from somewhere.”

Tornado said.

There were a few Adventurers Guild executives who frowned but they did not object.

“Byuui will be a special case and shall be recognized as a C-rank adventurer. Furthermore, he will be made to form a party and once they subjugate the blade sharks terrorizing the southern fishing ground, it will be recognized as a B-rank adventurers party and after that, he will back-up the entire Zoltan. I take it there are no objections.”

They had tried to ask Lit to return but she did not agree in the end. There was no room for negotiation.

However, there was no way they could ask the elderly ex-mayor Mistome-shi, the Archmage, to become an adventurer once again. Guard Captain Moen was also busy as the Devil’s Divine Protection issue was still ongoing.

There was no choice other than to have Byuui replace Albert as the B-rank adventurer.

“Moreover, Byuui is a disciple of that companion of the Hero, the Martial Artist Danan, right?”

“Yes, Hero Lit said so. We have not confirmed it though.”

“There’s no way to find out any background or anything about him in a remote border like here. Lit should know that too. The way she mentioned it was ambiguous as well, right? In short, it is still a status that makes it convenient for us to entrust the B-rank position to him.”

Tornado knew that that young swordswoman Lit was actually a shrewd individual excellent in political bargaining as well.

Tornado's successor as mayor, the Adventurers Guild executive, Goran, was a somewhat unreliable individual so Tornado had decided that he must solidify the foundation in Zoltan during his term of office.

Mistome-shi was an excellent magic-user but he was a mediocre mayor.

Terrible measures that were worse than bad such as settling situations by directly fighting in the frontlines. Then what would happen once Mistome-shi retired?

The mayor's role was to construct a system which could smoothly resolve any problem even without the mayor present. That was Tornado's take on the job.

"So, we'll proceed as planned?"

"Yes, there should not be a one in a million chance that he would lose to enemies the level of blade sharks. Release the authorization for B-rank as soon as he returns. On my side, while holding a memorial ceremony for the victims of this incident, I plan to appeal to the citizens with the birth of a new Hero."

In the end, this meeting was just to confirm the plan they had initially decided upon.

B-rank adventurer Byuui. If he continued to remain in Zoltan, he might one day become the mayor.

He was the young hero who would bring Zoltan to new heights.

Chapter 44

Hero Ruti and the Contract Demon

In the outskirts of the northern end of the central region of Zoltan.

Stood the mansion of General William, the barracks and stables for the 40 dragoon cavaliers under his command, and beside it, Zoltan's prison.

There was an interrogation room in the Guard Station as well but that was only a facility to house suspects after their arrest.

Even if the trial was still ongoing, it was a convention to imprison them in the prison once the suspects have been determined to be criminals.

Albert and Big Hawk and his gang have already been imprisoned there.

Zoltan's prison functioned to hold the criminals and through William's guidance... however, in reality, William had thrown that duty entirely to his subordinates so he wasn't involved at all but... they would be made to participate in pioneering teams or crushed and tamed to the extent that they could be used as militia.

That said, they couldn't afford the food expenses for the majority of the criminals so most of them were sold as criminal slaves after all.

The only criminals that remained there would be those with ample financial assets or individuals that William's subordinates have determined to be strong warriors which would be a waste to be sold away.

"Oi, Big Hawk."

The voice of a prison guard with a baton on his waist rang out in the prison.

The prison guard was faced with the terrible spectacle of Big Hawk seating cross-legged in a brazen seating posture.

“Interrogation time.”

“There wasn’t a schedule for one today though?”

“There was a change in schedule.”

“For what circumstances?”

“Nothing you bastard need to know. Hurry up and get out.”

The prison guard took his baton in his hand.

Big Hawk obediently stood his enormous body up with great effort.



Big Hawk was hand-cuffed along with finger cuffs as measures against magic and martial techniques and was made to seat in the interrogation room partitioned by sturdy steel doors.

Invocation of magic or martial techniques required a specific set of movements. Finger cuffs were meant to prevent such movements.

Well, there were plenty of skills capable of dealing with such circumstances but magic tools would be required to prevent such skills.

But that was Zoltan prison’s actual state as it could not afford a single handcuff that would cost a couple thousand Peryl.

“Not yet?”

“Shut up and stop complaining.”

“This is a waste of time even for you. I would prefer if you brought me over once the other party was present.”

The prison guard sighed.

He heard that this man had committed quite a serious crime.

The jury would probably sentence him to capital punishment. It was believed that the

Thieves Guild would interfere but they did not.

Instead, the atmosphere seemed as though they were feeling relieved at the removal of a nuisance.

Big Hawk had risen up the ranks using high-handed means and was a heretic that deviated from the ways of Zoltan. He was even shunned by his own companions.

The prison guard wondered until when would the man's complacency continue... and that he would have to overpower that obese body if the man came to a realization of the fact that he would not be saved and went on a rampage.

Having that thought, the prison guard looked forward to seeing the instant his arrogant expression crumble but on the flip side, he became depressed imagining just how much he would have to struggle to restrain him.

The knocker on the steel door banged loudly.

"We're okay here."

The prison guard replied.

It was a procedure to prevent the situation in which the door was opened when the criminal had gotten out of his restraints.

A key was inserted and unlocked the door with a click.

Two men entered. One of them was a prison guard. The other was...

"Could you wait outside as well? I wish to speak to him alone."

"There's no way that can be done."

"I have the authorization permit."

"...Understood. Call out to us from the inside once you are done."

After the young man told them that, the two prison guards exited the door and locked it.

The young man... the Adventurer Byuui faced toward Big Hawk and grinned.

“Sup Beriel.”

The cool expression that Big Hawk was sporting distorted with surprise.

Beriel was the Contract Demon’s real racial name, his true name.

A demon’s name fundamentally comes from the nature of their race, it was not something simple like the names that humans and Elves arbitrarily name themselves with. It was a common practice among demons to only secretly use their true name with fellow demons and to never reveal it to other races.

“Don’t be surprised. I have eaten Contract Demons in the past. We practically know the true names of all demons.”

“Yo-you, why are you here!?”

“I’m glad Red faced you before I did. It would have been foolish of me if I revealed your true identity on the spot.”

“A...!”

Byuui... Shisandan grabbed the neck of the Contract Demon who was about to call out his name to silence him.

“You guys have been acting without thinking of the consequences. You even brought out the ‘Devil’s Divine Protection’. What would you have done if the humans realized that the drug doesn’t actually need demon hearts? That is a drug that can unleash the true potential power dormant within humans. Although the Gods forbid it too.”

“In-in order to destroy you heretics... the Gods will forgive my sins.”

“A familiar spirit that controls human sins commits a sin. How amusing.”

Sweat formed on the face of the Contract Demon.

(Shit, this guy knows the method to kill me even if I'm hiding inside...!)

It was no longer a situation where he bothered about a drop in his Divine Protection level.

"I, Inmanu! Annul my contract with Big Hawk!"

The Contract Demons declared with a hoarse voice despite having his throat tightened.

The contract document appeared in midair. Then, the contract document shattered with a sound.

"Otto."

A magical tornado appeared around the Contract Demon.

Shisandan lightly stepped backward and escaped from the influence.

"Chiiiiiiii !!!!"

The Contract Demon's true appearance was revealed, a human face with horns as well as goat legs.

The demon scattered and restrained the flames as it immediately headed toward the door.

"What's happening!?"

The prison guard called out from the other side of the door after hearing the disturbance in the room... That was his misfortune.

The demon used its superhuman strength to slam into the door.

The steel door was crushed without being able to withstand it and was sent flying.

The prison guard standing directly in front of the door was caught by the flying door and was blown away a few meters before he was trapped below it.

The bones on his neck was broken by the impact and he died instantly.

However, he did not feel any fear or pain due to the sudden event so that might have been a slight reprieve.

The demon roared as it fled.

The prison guards were trained to deal with prison breaks but in front of a sprinting Senior-rank demon, they were in chaos and their thought processes ground to a halt.

Nobody stopped the demon but the demon was not heading outside.

The demon was heading toward another prison cell.

“Albert!”

Hearing his name, the man with bandages on his right hand, disheveled hair and cloudy eyes stared at the demon through the gap.

“Albert! Make a new wish! To leave here and reach the heroes!”

“...I don’t care anymore.”

“No! You promised to devote your life to subjugating the Demon Lord! The contract will not allow you to rot here like this! Now, make the wish!”

This was the reason the Contract Demon had composure.

Even if the initial contract did not require his soul to be dedicated, if there was no other way to subjugate the Demon Lord, Albert would have no choice but to pledge his soul for the contract.

Albert’s soul was superior compared to Big Hawk’s soul.

The penalty for breaking the contract was large but the Contract Demon calculated that he could compensate for most of it this way.

“...All right, do as you wish.”

Albert felt a compelling force and he nodded without resisting it.

“Good! I, Inmanu! Sign a contract with Albert here!”

Normally, it would go through all kinds of procedures to ensure there were no loopholes but there was no time to do so.

It had to escape from there immediately.

It must transport the operational data of the ‘Devil’s Divine Protection’ from Zoltan to the Resistance.

The contract magic activated despite being incomplete, causing the contract document, a pen, and a knife to appear.

“Hurry up!”

The Contract Demon urged him but Albert slowly picked up the pen, recorded his name and took the knife before he...

“Is it all right to use my left hand?”

“It’s fine so hurry up!”

He pressed the thumb on his left hand to the knife on the floor, producing a small cut and pressed that thumb to the contract document.

“The contract is made! As compensation for that wish! Your soul is mine!”

It made it! The demon was relieved.

But why was it able to make it?

Even though enough time had passed that it should have been able to catch up to it normally.

The demon was doubtful but the magical power from the contract caused a tornado to form and nobody remained in the cell the next instant.



Byuui peered into the interior from the entrance and smiled happily.

“It went well.”

Revealing its true identity as Asura was the most troubling.

Of course, he would normally not be believed. It would be laughed off as the ramblings of a criminal.

However, in this town, there was at least one person who would surely arrive at the truth with just those words.

Shisandan was cautious of that.

“Byuui! Are you all right!?”

“Unfortunately, it escaped.”

Byuui, who was called out to by the prison guard, replied with a regrettable expression.

But he would probably not be blamed for the escape of a Senior-rank demon.

After all, that was an existence that Zoltan, which lacked even a B-rank adventurer, could not deal with.

There was a possibility that he would even be evaluated as having chased it away.

As he explained about the Contract Demon to the gathered prison guards, Byuui thought about the issues he would have to investigate in this town.



Having suppressed the Demon Lord Army's camp, Ruti was collecting the spoils of war when one emancipated man... Albert and the Contract Demon appeared in front of her.

The demon activated a skill before Ruti drew her sword.

"Shift of Mind Plains!"

Ruti found herself not in the Demon Lord Army camp within the forest but on top of a cracked deserted land.

The man that should have been beside the demon was no longer there.

Ruti tilted her head slightly.

"Hero Ruti-dono, a pleasure to meet you for the first time. I am the Devil's contractor, please call me a Contract Demon."

Ruti stared at the Contract Demon that was speaking in superficial courtesy with frosty eyes.

Ruti drew the sword on her waist but the Holy Sword of Demon Slaying had transformed into a shabby copper sword.

"This is the Spiritual World. I brought you here because I have something I wish to talk to you about. Please forgive me for my rudeness."

"I forgive you. So, what is it?"

"You're very calm. If you are actually aiming for a chance to retaliate, I will explain in advance. This is a simulated world made through my and your spirit. However, any wounds suffered here will be reflected on your actual physical body so please be aware."

“I see.”

“I am certain that you are strong in reality but this world places a restriction on most skills and magic. So you need to be accustomed to be able to fight here, for example.”

The Contract Demon concentrated.

“Something” “Like this” “Can be done too.”

Clones of the Contract Demon appeared one after the other.

Before she knew it, the Hero Ruti was surrounded by endless Contract Demons that covered the entire deserted land.

“How is it? Are you surprised?”

“I do not get surprised.”

“Is that so? It’s received well by everyone else though. Well, I hope this showed that it would be better if you don’t defy me in this world. I didn’t bring you here to kill you anyway. I am hostile toward the Demon Lord Army. So let’s have a peaceful talk.”

The Contract Demon was relieved that it could gain the dominant position.

In order to survive, it had to conduct itself well here.

It might even be able to pull the Hero in and that would dispel the defeat it faced in Zoltan.

“Defy?”

Ruti tilted her head and lowered her gaze to the copper sword.

“Wha!?”

The Contract Demon was amazing at that sight.

The copper sword shone and she now held the Holy Sword of Demon Slaying.

(Im-impossible!? To reproduce an Artifact-grade magic item in the Spiritual World!? Even I can't...)

"I see, I roughly get it."

Ruti muttered and raised her right hand holding the sword up to the sky.

Then, silver rain started falling.

"U, ah... Hi, hiiiiii!!!"

The Contract Demon was in horror. In its centuries of life, it was the first time it experienced its thought process stopping due to fear.

What it saw everywhere in the deserted land were countless holy swords inexplicably stabbed into the ground. To the demons that covered the deserted land, it was a scene whereby the countless Holy Sword of Demon Slaying that appeared in the sky rained down on them and annihilated them.

"Im-impossible! There's no way this is possible! To be able to reproduce uncountable numbers of artifacts! I have never heard of a Hero or Demon Lord capable of something like this!!"

Before one realized, the dry deserted land had transformed into a red swamp filled with the drifting stench of death from the demon's blood.

"By the way, what did you want to talk about?"

Ruti asked the Senior-rank demon, that was grabbing its head as it screamed in despair, without any change in her expression.

Chapter 45

The Hero obtains wings

“I see.”

Ruti nodded expressionlessly after listening to the Contract Demon’s explanation.

“Ye-yes! I am absolutely not hostile toward the humans of this continent. I belong to the faction that wishes to subjugate the heretic Demon Lord that oppose God. It is true that on the Avalon continent, demons are a race hostile toward humans but we are believers of the same God, the Supreme God Demise. In order to deal with the heretics who oppose God, we are capable of putting aside past grudges and fight alongside humans!”

As the Contract Demon desperately spun its words, Ruti listened with a smile that only her brother could understand.

(So this is the truth of the existence of demons. Interesting.)

Her big brother would have been astonished if he was here, after all, they had exchanged countless hours of discussions on their observations.

Ruti thought to herself regretfully. Even that slight fluctuation in her feelings caused the Contract Demon to tremble in fear and stifle a scream.

At the moment, the Contract Demon was being questioned in Ruti’s tent with both its arms and fingers secured with chains.

Nothing had been done to it other than having questions asked but the demon understood the absolute difference between it and the young female creature seated in front of it. It had no willpower to resist and merely wished to survive.

The hero party waiting outside the tent were secretly sympathetic with it suffering a

questioning in a tent with the Hero in it but the demon did not know that.

Albert had been tied up and questioned by Ares but Ares had already judged that he did not have any significant information and had left him alone.

“So, this drug is the ‘Devil’s Divine Protection’ huh?”

“This is a drug made using the hearts of Axe Demons so it would produce a pseudo-Divine Protection of the Axe Demon. The strength of this drug is that it can interchange levels with a person’s innate Divine Protection.”

“Interchange?”

“Yes! Taking one dose of this drug would transfer one level to the Devil’s Divine Protection. Also, not taking this drug for one week would cause the Devil’s Divine Protection to return one level to the person’s innate Divine Protection.”

“And so?”

“The greatest advantage of this is not that effect but the lowering of a person’s Divine Protection’s maximum level. As you all know, a person’s Divine Protection level can only grow by defeating a being with Divine Protection of same or higher level. Although the Devil’s Divine Protection will not grow as one fights... by using this drug, it could give the effect of temporarily reducing a person’s innate Divine Protection level so that the person can experience efficient growth and his combat ability would not drop as well due to the Devil’s Divine Protection!”

This was actually the true reason why the recipe of the God’s forbidden secret medicine was told to the demons, who are the most devout out of all the races.

To the demons, the Devil’s Divine Protection drug was not a medicine meant to deny Divine Protections but a medicine meant to raise Divine Protection levels.

“I see.”

Ruti crushed the powdered medicine wrapped in paper that she snatched from the demon in her hand.

“This will be useful in the subjugation of the Demon Lord?”

“Ye-yes! Although a person on the level of He-hero-sama shouldn’t expect much from its effects.”

“I’ll give it a try.”

“Ha?”

Ruti swallowed the medicine without hesitation in front of the demon’s eyes.

The demon’s eyes were wide in shock and it was at a loss for words.

Of course, the demon’s goal was to pull in the Hero. It handed the medicine to the Hero as it thought that there was a possibility the medicine could strengthen the Hero to aid her defeat of the Demon Lord.

However, it never imagined that she would swallow the medicine without any hesitation in such a situation.

“It is because poison, disease and curses are ineffective against me. If this was not a medicine, my resistances should have activated.”

Ruti carelessly explained perhaps because she noticed the demon’s gaze.

But the demon was taken aback as cold sweat emerged from its entire body after hearing those words.

(Curses? Curses!? She has complete resistance against curses!? This is bad, this is bad! That medicine was made by stitching together the grudges from the slain Axe Demons that had transformed into curses along with the Demon’s Divine Protections that should normally disappear upon death! If the curse would not activate, there is a possibility that the Axe Demon Divine Protection would be lost!!)

But it was too late.

She had consumed the medicine.

It should make her vomit the medicine out before the medicine is absorbed into her

body but the Demon did not have the freedom nor the power to do so.

The demon prayed to God.

Please, may the Devil's Divine Protection manifest its effects.



Morning the next day.

Ares and Theodora were in shock.

The two of them watched the flying ship sail away without being able to do anything.

The tied-up Albert showed an anxious expression without knowing what was happening.

"What happened?"

"I don't know, the flying ship was stolen...?"

"Don't run away from reality. The Hero and Tise are not around. We have been left behind."

"No-no way! That is impossible! How will they fight without my magic?!"

"She probably can."

Theodora coldly replied and ignored Ares as she investigated the empty shell of the Hero's tent.

"This is..."

She found the fallen corpse of the Contract Demon with its head cut off.

"There was no way she could have been fooled by a demon... that's obvious."

There were a few camping tools and equipment left behind but the important items were all kept in the Hero's item bag so the Hero's journey should not be hindered.

However,

“No-no way!?”

Theodora was violently shaken by the item she found on the floor.

“The proof of the Hero, the legendary amulet made of Orichalcum that was sealed in an ancient Elf ruin!”

Even though it was located within the forest near the Imperial Capital, in the deepest depths of an ancient Elf ruin that nobody has ever stepped foot into, Hero Ruti obtained that amulet which she used to make the world acknowledge her as a hero.

Ruti would never let go of that item as long as she was a Hero... but, in reality, the proof of a Hero had been found there on the ground.

“I guess I will head to places where there have been sightings of a flying ship.”

Theodora left the camp on her own.

Chapter 46

Well wishes for the two's journey

I am an assassin affiliated with the Assassin's Guild. My name is Tise·Garland and I possess the Divine Protection of the Assassin.

I was sold by a slave merchant when I was young and purchased by the Assassin's Guild and had worked to feed myself as a killer for as long as I could remember. My favorite food is fish paste oden.

A lot of things happened and I ended up participating in the Hero-sama's party.

I had a short-lived dream that perhaps an assassin like myself could be a hero too but my employer the Sage Ares-sama told me clearly that I was only a stand-in until he could find another member. What a pity.

My pet is a jumping spider named Ugeuge-san. Its name includes the 'san'.

Its act of raising its front legs and swaying back and forth is extremely cute. I'm glad that there is the [Spider Empathy] skill that allows assassins to use poisonous spiders.

Even in this terrifying circumstance, Ugeuge-san was still happily standing on my shoulder and waving its small front feet as if to cheer me up and comfort me. Thank you. I'll splurge on your meal today.

I got a warm and fluffy feeling from seeing Ugeuge-san innocently rejoicing.

"How much further until Zoltan?"

Came a chilly voice that penetrates into one's body.

"I believe it will take around three days more..."

"Amazing. Even though it would take up to a week for a fast ship to do that."

She was probably happy. Even though her expression did not change at all.

My heartbeat quickened by 1.5 times. My hands were trembling and cold sweat was coming out from my entire body.

Naturally, that was the scream coming from my body's survival instincts.

Hero-sama once commented that I was fine even though I was nearby her. And she patted my shoulder but it was terrible! It was only because of my training to separate my facial expression and my feelings ... I was crying on the inside.

Currently, I was maneuvering the flying ship.

According to the legend my close friend in the Assassin's Guild told me, there was an Orc on the side of justice by the name of Hero White Fang who fought alongside the humans and betrayed the previous Demon Lord or the Demon Lord before that and stole a flying ship.

Of course, she did not believe that story either but she was a great narrator.

When I asked, she said that her Divine Protection was Deadly Courtesan, in other words, an assassin prostitute. Most likely her speech was pleasant to the ears because of that.

And in the story that she told, there was a scene where White Fang taught his beloved young female slave the method to steer the flying ship.

It was a scene in which the method to maneuver the flying ship was taught through a song like the counting song but I never imagined that knowledge could be used to actually steer a flying ship.

There were some minor differences but having allocated the skill points that I had leftover for emergencies into the common skill 『Handling』, it intuitively taught me the portions I lacked as I piloted the ship.

Thanks to that, even though there were some functions that I have no idea what they were for, I could somehow operate it to move normally.

Although that had bitten me in the back as I was dragged along by Hero-sama in order to steer the flying ship.

“E-er....”

“What is it?”

“I-it’s okay if you don’t want to say it but why Zoltan?”

I actually wanted to ask why did she leave her companions behind but I was too afraid to ask.

Save me, Ugeuge-san.

“?”

I looked to Ugeuge-san for help and it tilted its head like it was troubled.

Cute.

Hero-sama looked like she was hesitating for a while before she took out a small paper package from her pocket and showed it to me.

“Even though I have the recipe to compound this medicine, I do not know the skills required to do so. That’s why we are heading to Zoltan to where the person who made it is located.”

“Medicine?”

“Yes.”

“.....”

“.....”

“Er-erm, what medicine is it?”

At that moment, a terrible thing happened.

Hero-sama stared intently into my eyes ... and she spread the edge of her lips and smiled.

I heard from somebody. That smiling was originally a ferocious expression.

I felt fear from the depths of my heart.

“So-sorry...”

“This medicine is my hope. But there are only three left. The effect will run out in one week. That’s why I need to be able to periodically replenish it ... for that sake, I wish to reach Zoltan as soon as possible.”

“Ye-yes! I’ll do my best!”

Ah! I shouldn’t have asked!

I should just transport Hero-sama without thinking about anything. Right, I am part of the flying ship. I am a gear. 《Guru guru guru guru》

Ugeuge-san was hopping up and down on my shoulder. It was telling me to cheer up.

Yup, I’ll do my best. I promised Ugeuge-san that I will find it a cute partner.

Ugeuge-san’s gestures were the supports of my heart.

“What great weather.”

Hero-sama said as she looked up into the sky.

I am a gear. <Guru guru guru guru>

◇ ◇ ◇

“I have been in your care!”

Al bowed his head low.

It was evening.

Today, Al helped out in the shop for the whole day and trained with Lit in the evening. Then, he happily ate dinner with us... and left the shop.

“Hey, you could leave tomorrow morning too?”

Lit asked.

Al smiled happily but he shook his head.

“No, this place is comfortable so... if I stayed until tomorrow morning, I would end up staying until the afternoon, then until the evening too.”

“Is that so.”

On Al’s waist was the shotel I passed to him.

On his shoulder was a sturdy traveler’s cloak that Lit chose. His upper body was covered by a silver breastplate that Big Hawk gave him, the breastplate was apparently chosen by Albert.

Even though they had never met directly, the fact that the breastplate fit Al’s body perfectly showed how Albert even gave equipment advice to his companions who lacked ability so that they would not die during B-rank requests.

On his back was a backpack. Inside were preserved food, whetstone, rope, and soap. Lantern and oilcan. A flint. Hemostatics, antidotes, and three cure potions that I chose. Iron pot and dishware as well as a sleeping bag.

Equipment that would not shame an adventurer no matter where he was.

“Thank you for preparing dinner for me too.”

The female dress in a sister outfit bowed.

She was the female priest originally from Albert’s party. Her name was Leah.

That’s right. She and a number of other adventurers have formed a party with Al to

mark the start of their adventuring journey.

They formed an E-rank adventurer party with Al included.

After the incident, there was another disturbance.

The Contract Demon and Albert's escape from the prison.

What remained was Big Hawk who had lost his extravagant flab and became a skinny and shabby Half-Orc youngster.

Normally, Big Hawk would not be able to escape execution due to what he had perpetrated but the Central Demon Study scholars expressed interest in the living survivor who had a contract with a Contract Demon so he was escorted to the Imperial Capital just yesterday.

In the end, it was quite a big incident.

The number two of the Thieves Guild and the number one adventurer of the town colluded, the residents caused a riot, there were secret maneuvers by a demon, an unknown mystery drug and there were casualties too.

Nevertheless, today, Zoltan had returned to its daily routine.

The South Marsh residents were dissatisfied, there was prejudice in the upper class and the lower class and they hated the guards.

Albert was lost but Byuui was accepted as a B-rank adventurer in his place and it seemed that he was doing well.

However, something strange happened.

"I was moved! When Al-kun's words prevented the fight before it happened, I thought that perhaps that was the true role of a hero!"

Albert's companions were at the scene too.

After the uproar, this female priest Leah offered to form a party with Al and Ademi because she was touched by their speech. It seemed that there were other applicants

as well.

Al immediately agreed after hearing Leah's offer.

"I am still a level 1 novice but... I look forward to working with you!"

Instead of the youngster who was afraid of his own Divine Protection when he first met me, now, he had the strong gaze of an adventurer that have accepted their Divine Protection and was trying to move forward.

This incident had changed Al.

"See you!"

Al extended his right hand.

Lit and I shook his hand tightly.

"Do your best."

"You can come by anytime if you need medicine. I'll give you a discount."

"No! I will find amazing treasures and become rich so that I can pay for enough medicine for Red-san and Lit-san to get mithril silver rings as presents!"

"That would be wonderful!"

"Mithril silver huh, that's a grand dream."

Sounds good, people like him will go far.

I pat Al's curly head hair. That was probably the last time I could treat him like a child like that.

It felt somewhat lonely.

"Good luck, Adventurer Al."

“Yes!”

Al showed a full-faced smile and a slightly sad expression...

And left Red and Lit's Apothecary.

“He has left.”

“Yup, he has.”

“It somehow felt like we had a child.”

“Yeah, I felt the same too.”

The two of us looked at each other.

“Children huh, it's not that bad.”

“It's not bad.”

The two of us smiled together.

That's right, let's return to the happy everyday Zoltan life too.



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